

THE PRAGMATIC ENTENTE:  
TURKEY'S GROWING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

Randy J. Smith

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## ABSTRACT

For the past decade, the international political system has undergone a significant transformation as it has tried to adjust to the end of the bipolar world. The post-Cold War era has allowed individual states more freedom of maneuver in implementing foreign policy initiatives and one of the most ambitious states in this regard has been the Republic of Turkey. Turkey has initiated several bold initiatives that have all experienced varying degrees of success. However, the initiative that has created the most controversy is Turkey's increasing cooperation with Israel.

This study reveals what has been officially agreed upon by the two countries in terms of military, economic and political relations and traces the history of Turkish-Israeli relations from 1948 to the present. In the course of this discussion, the vital role of the United States becomes apparent as well as both countries' turbulent regional relations. It is these regional relations, this study argues, that has given Turkey and Israel primary motive for entering into closer cooperation. In almost all fields, cooperation between Turkey and Israel has increased and many states that perceive themselves threatened by this relationship have labeled it an alliance that threatens the entire Middle East. There are several potential impediments to continued Turkish-Israeli cooperation but none serious enough to significantly hinder relations. Thus, Turkey and Israel are in a position to dramatically influence Middle Eastern politics in the years ahead. It is therefore imperative for both countries to act cautiously and bring about a more prosperous Middle East where regional cooperation replaces political rivalry.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

During the past ten years, the world has witnessed many changes in the international system and has experienced many surprising developments. One of these surprises has been the growing closeness between the Muslim state of Turkey and the Jewish state of Israel. However, given the changes in the international system, that is, the change from a bipolar world to a unipolar world, this relationship should not have been unforeseen, and in fact could have been expected. If one had looked closely, one would have anticipated that the environment that the end of the Cold War presented would force these two ideologically similar countries together. This possibility was not lost on Turkey or Israel. Not wishing to miss the unique window of opportunity that the end of the Cold War offered, Turkey and Israel quickly warmed towards one another and entered into a series of agreements that promise much hope, but which also create a large amount of fear.

It is the purpose of this thesis to reveal what the Turkish-Israeli agreements are, what the regional impact of this relationship is, and whether this relationship offers an insight into how international relations in the Middle East operate. The first chapter orients the reader to the agreements that have been signed between Turkey and Israel, reviews the changes in the international system and discusses Turkey's response to these changes. Chapter Two provides a chronological history of Turkish-Israeli relations and also presents the vital role the United States plays in this relationship. The focus of Chapter Three is Turkey and Israel's relations with their neighbors and extra-regional entities as well as Turkey and Israel's motives for entering into an entente. Chapter Four reveals the complexities of the relationship by reviewing the October 1998 crisis between Turkey and Syria and discusses potential obstacles to further cooperation. The fifth and final chapter is a discussion of the relevance of the Turkish-Israeli agreements to Middle Eastern regional politics.

### The Agreements

Early in 1996, Cevik Bir, Deputy Chairman of the Turkish Armed Forces, made a low-profile visit to Israel and on 23 February, along with David Ivry, General Director of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, signed the Military Training Cooperation Agreement (MTCA).<sup>1</sup> Although this was the third military agreement between Turkey and Israel, coming after the March 1994 Security and Secrecy Agreement and the September 1995 Memorandum of Understanding for the training of pilots, the MTCA was thus far the most comprehensive.<sup>2</sup>

According to the agreement, both parties "*stress the desire for promoting relations and cooperation, believe bilateral cooperation to be of mutual benefit and recognize that such cooperation can promote further relations.*"<sup>3</sup> The MTCA will be effective for five years from the date of signature and if neither party declares it null and void by a diplomatic note in 90 days prior to its expiration date, the agreement will continue for periods of one year.<sup>4</sup> Air and naval training is the primary focus of the MTCA but could grow to encompass ground forces. The MTCA explicitly states "*that exchange personnel will not participate in any clash between the receiving state and a third party and will not be assigned to any activity while in the receiving state.*"<sup>5</sup>

While the MTCA established a legal structure by which cooperation could proceed, cordiality of relations would dictate how close the cooperation would become. By all accounts, relations have been quite cordial and military training cooperation between Turkey and Israel has grown rapidly.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Michael Carlin, USAF, Defense Attaché -Ankara furnished a copy of the Turkey-Israel Military Training Cooperation Agreement to the author.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Blanche, "The 'Phantom Alliance'," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, vol.31, no. 10 (10 March 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Turkey-Israel Military Training Cooperation Agreement, 23 February 1996, preamble.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Article III, para. 6.1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Article III, para. 5.1.



In April 1996, eight Israeli F-16s made their first visit to Turkey's Akinci Air Base for a week of training. Turkey reciprocated in June 1996 with their debut flight over Israel. Both countries have been quick to stress the non-aggressiveness of these training flights and in order to allay the fears of other nations, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a press release stating that the aircraft participating in the training would not be armed and would not be carrying electronic listening devices.<sup>6</sup> Under the provision for naval exercises, Operation Reliant Mermaid, a joint search and rescue exercise, was conducted in January 1998 and involved not only Turkey and Israel but also the United States and had Jordan as an observer. The next joint naval exercise is tentatively scheduled for November 1999.

During the tensions surrounding southern Cyprus' purchase of Russian-made S-300 surface-to-air missiles in 1997-98, the *Jerusalem Post* and the *Turkish Daily News* reported that Israel was training Turkish F-16 pilots on maneuvers to evade these type of missiles and on tactics to attack the firing platform.<sup>7</sup> These reports were not denied by either government and are quite probable since the Turks, unlike the Israelis, have no combat experience in attacking missile sites and were training at Israel's advanced training facility in the Negev Desert. It may also have been no more than coincidence that in November 1998, two Israeli agents were arrested by Greek Cypriot authorities on the southern coast of the island with sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment near a restricted military zone at a time when the S-300s were expected to arrive. Charges of espionage were eventually reduced to a lesser charge and in fact, the whole S-300 missile issue was averted when the Greek Cypriots chose not to receive shipment of the missiles. From this issue however, Turkey realized the need for a range to train on evasion tactics and, with help from Israel, has developed their own missile evasion facility at Sivrihisari Air Base near

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<sup>6</sup> Foreign Ministry Press Release, 4 April 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Metehan Demir, *Hurriyet* defense correspondent, formerly with the *Turkish Daily News*, interview by author, 27 July 1999.

Eskisehir.<sup>8</sup> Turkey benefits from Israeli expertise and technology, but also contributes valuable assets of its own.

Turkey offers Israel access to its vast airspace in which Israeli pilots can train. Being less than 21,000 square kilometers, Israel is quite small especially when travelling at supersonic speeds in today's advanced aircraft. With only limited space, one practice range and restricted terrain, Israeli pilots have become complacent and training exercises have become routine.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, training in Turkey offers open skies, several training ranges and a vast variation of terrain. Thus the Israeli pilots are effectively challenged and are able to attain a qualitative edge over potential adversaries. Besides its airspace, Turkey also possesses highly advanced training facilities that Israel is lacking. For example, Israel can now use Turkey's dive tower for its mandatory submariner training instead of receiving this training in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Turkey's centrifuge provides Israeli pilots with a readily available facility to conduct training that previously was done in other countries.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the precarious task of conducting instrument landings on cargo aircraft can now be executed at Turkey's many military airfields instead of using the crowded civilian Ben Gurion International Airport.

Realizing the mutual benefits of training cooperation, Turkey and Israel increased their military representation in each other's capital. Turkey increased the number of military attaches in Tel Aviv from one to three (Army, Navy and Air Force) and Israel reciprocated by adding an Army Attaché in Ankara to its existing Air Force Attaché. Strategic talks are held twice a year, once in each respective capital. At the talks, past training is discussed and future training is

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<sup>8</sup> Colonel Beni Cohen, Israeli Air Force, Defense Attaché - Ankara, interview by author, notes, Ankara, Turkey, 27 July 1999

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Michael Carlin, US Air Force, Defense Attaché - Ankara, interview by author, notes, Ankara, Turkey, 26 July 1999

<sup>10</sup> Cohen. There is a mandatory annual requirement for personnel who perform duty on Israeli submarines to undergo testing at a dive tower. The dive tower is tube in the sea where personnel descend to a depth of 100 meters. During the descent and subsequent ascent, data is collected on the submariner's bodily responses to the submersion and his ability to manage the dive.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

planned. Both sides are very content with the manner in which cooperation has progressed and look forward to future training with anticipation.<sup>12</sup> The MTCA was important for establishing closer ties between the two militaries and mutual appreciation has fostered increased cooperation. Since the militaries were becoming much closer, it would therefore be quite natural for the military industrial complexes of these two countries to move towards one another.

On 28 August 1996, Turkey and Israel signed a Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement (DICA).<sup>13</sup> This agreement creates cooperation among the two defense industries and permits the acquisition, sale and joint production of military materiel. The agreement allows a mechanism by which the Turkish Military can modernize its forces and Israel can increase the viability of its defense industry. Under the DICA, Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) will perform \$632 million worth of avionics and structural upgrades to Turkey's aging Vietnam-era fleet of F-4 Phantom fighter/bombers.<sup>14</sup> The first prototype of the Phantom 200 made its maiden flight at the Ben-Gurion International Airport on 11 February 1999 and the first group of upgraded aircraft was re-delivered to Turkey on 1 March 1999.<sup>15</sup> IAI also won the contract to upgrade Turkey's F-5 fighter aircraft for \$70 million.<sup>16</sup> Israel wants to provide Turkey with the air-to-ground POPEYE missile for these aircraft and Turkey and Israel are negotiating to jointly produce the more advanced POPEYE LITE missile.<sup>17</sup> Turkey is also considering additional Israeli armaments including the ARROW missile-defense system, the PHALCON early-warning aircraft system, an

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Blanche, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Rodan, "Israel's Defense Industry: Preparing for the Merger Plunge," *Military Technology* 23 (June 1999): 57.

<sup>15</sup> Michael J. Gething, "First Modernized F4E re-delivered to Turkey," *Jane's Defense Upgrade* 3 (12 March 1999): 5.

<sup>16</sup> "IAI Signs F-5 Trainer Conversion Deal with Turkey," *Defense Daily*, vol. 200, no. 27 (15 March 1999).

<sup>17</sup> POPEYE, produced by Rafael Armament Development Authority, is an air-to ground high-precision missile with Electro-Optical guidance. It is intended to engage heavily defended, high-value targets at a stand-off range of some 100 km. The only aircraft in the Turkish Air Force that can use POPEYE is the F4 Phantom. POPEYE LITE is a lightweight version of POPEYE and is designed to be compatible with the F16 fighter. Since 1996, Rafael's POPEYE has been co-produced with Lockheed Martin and sold to the United States Air Force under the name AGM 142/HAVE NAP. There is currently a debate on whether or not POPEYE contains US - origin technology, which could effect the sale of these weapons to Turkey. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

attack helicopter, and the MERKAVA Mark III main battle tank.<sup>18</sup> Turkey has announced that it plans to spend \$150 billion on defense over the next twenty years and the DICA allows Turkey the ability to obtain high-tech weaponry from the region's most advanced military power. Thus, these agreements unite Turkish massiveness with Israeli expertise.

The defense and security agreements since 1994 are quite extensive and together provide protocols concerning officer exchanges, visits by military delegations, naval port calls, access to training areas, joint air and naval training, cooperation in the areas of counterterrorism and border security, and defense industry cooperation.<sup>19</sup> However, these arrangements are only the most publicized part of the growing relations between Turkey and Israel for they have also entered into agreements in non-military areas.

A Turkish-Israeli Free Trade Accord, signed on 14 March 1996, anticipates a quadruple increase in annual trade between the two countries in just four years. In contrast to the military agreements, this trade agreement is expected to benefit Turkey more favorably financially. In 1997, Turkey's exports to Israel increased by 54% from the previous year, whereas its imports from Israel increased 19% for the same period.<sup>20</sup> Exports to Israel in 1998 were worth \$479 million, which is a 22.2% increase from 1997.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to the Free Trade Agreement, several other accords were negotiated between Turkey and Israel. In January of 1996, the following agreements were signed: the Economic, Commercial,

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<sup>18</sup> Turkey intends to modernize its defense and Israel can offer advanced weapons to satisfy Turkey's demands. The ARROW Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missile (ATBM) system is a program under development to intercept in-coming ballistic missiles. The program is headed by IAI but has a host of Israeli subcontractors as well as partial U.S. funding. The ARROW ATBM is a limited weapon system (referred to as a PATRIOT Plus) that will not provide countrywide protection from theater ballistic missiles. IAI and Raytheon have teamed to produce the PHALCON airborne early warning system and is a leading contender for the Turkish contract. Turkey has entertained a bid from an IAI-Kamov consortium for Turkey's \$5 billion attack helicopter contract but seems to have settled on the US-produced SUPERCobra. Israel also offers the MERKAVA Main Battle Tank (MBT) but the tank's producer, Israel Military Industries, has decided to join forces with General Dynamics to offer GD's M1A2 MBT with Israeli sub-components for Turkey's project to co-produce MBTs, which could be worth up to \$7 billion.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "The Middle East's New Friendship," New York Times, 14 April 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Office of the Turkish Prime Minister, Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade, on-line data accessed 9 September 1999; available from <http://www.foreigntrade.gov.tr>; internet.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Technological and Scientific Cooperation Agreement; an Agreement for the Prevention of Double Taxation; and an Agreement for Mutual encouragement and Protection of Investments.<sup>22</sup> In December 1996, the Agreement for Mutual Assistance between the Customs Authorities was signed.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these, Agreements for Cooperation in the fields of Telecommunications and Postal Services, Cooperation in Health and Medicine, and Financing of Trade with third countries by the Turkish Eximbank and the Israel Foreign Trade Risk Insurance Corporation have been signed.<sup>24</sup> Using the momentum of these accords, Turkey and Israel extended cooperation to the fields of transportation, energy, agriculture, education and training, construction, and tourism.<sup>25</sup> The tourism sector has been rapidly growing and in 1998, over 263,000 Israeli tourists visited Turkey.<sup>26</sup> Turkey and Israel have found each other during a time of much turmoil in their region and during a time where there has been much change in the international system.

### Changes in the International System

It is not the author's intent to discuss International Relations Theory or debate the relevance or appropriateness of any particular theory. However, most would agree that the Cold War has ended and the international system has undergone structural changes due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It therefore would be advantageous to look at these changes and then determine the effect these changes have had on Turkey's foreign policy.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, it has become clear that there has been a collapse of one type of structure (bipolarity) in favor of another (unipolarity). Despite the fact that there are several states that have increased capabilities relative to other states in various areas such as military, economic, technological and political affairs, there is only one state powerful enough to effect all

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<sup>22</sup> Ekrem Guvendiren, *A Concise Report on Turkish-Israeli Relationship* (Istanbul: Foreign Economic Board of Turkey, 1999), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

other countries more than they can effect it. This powerful state, of course, is the United States. Lost from the international order is the Soviet Union and gone is the ideological battle between Washington and Moscow for the allegiance of less powerful states.

During the Cold War, bipolarity urged those states that were not neutral to remain in the respective camp of their patron. The loss of this restraining influence has allowed formerly constrained states greater ability to choose a more independent foreign policy. Furthermore, regions that had previously been ideological battlegrounds of the superpowers have lost some of their strategic importance. Thus, the Middle East has become a region of lesser relative importance to the United States who is no longer willing to give unconditional protection and political support to regional members, or contribute financially to their security. This has altered the foreign policy of many of the governments of the region and has given them much more room to maneuver. Accordingly, Turkey's Foreign Ministry now is required to formulate policy with its own unique interests in mind and to concern itself with Turkey's pressing security issues that were not obvious under bipolarity.

Turkey is geographically situated in a strategic location. During the Cold War, Turkey maintained a relatively uncomplicated foreign policy. It was firmly entrenched in the Western (American) camp, generally opposed the Soviet Union, and largely ignored the rest of the world. There have been very few exceptions when Turkey deviated from its Western orientation or from Washington's guidance. However, in the post-Cold War environment, Turkey finds itself in a very complicated position as the following quote by Simon Mayall indicates:

In the new security environment, Turkey's geographical position and its military strength now made it a European, Balkan, Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, Caucasian, Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Sea Power. Sharing borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, Turkey's control of the Bosphorus and the Dardenelles also made it a Black Sea neighbor of Russia, the Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova. Turkey's ethnic roots lay in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, influencing its interests, concerns, and sympathies. Its Muslim identity demanded a community of interest in the Middle East, through Pakistan and across to Southeast Asia. None of the immediate and demanding post-Cold War issues of Bosnia, the Middle East Peace Process, Iraqi sanctions, Operation Provide Comfort, Trans-Caucasian

separatism, Russian activities in the 'near abroad,' CFE flank issues, NATO enlargement, Cyprus, Central Asia, and energy pipelines could be discussed without reference to Turkey.<sup>27</sup>

This newfound position accounts for a series of initiatives on which Turkey has embarked, all with varying degrees of success.

### **Turkish Response to Changes in the International System**

The decade of the 1990's was a turning point in Turkish foreign policy. Leading Turkey into this new era was President Turgut Ozal. This short, rotund and extremely dynamic leader had transformed the Turkish economy as Prime Minister during the 1980's and at the end of the decade turned his attention to foreign affairs as president. Ozal understood the significance of the collapse of the Soviet Union and wanted to place Turkey in position to take full advantage of the "new world order." When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and the United States was looking for regional coalition partners, Ozal did not hesitate to give his and Turkey's full support to the American effort. The fact that this course of action was an extreme departure from previous Turkish foreign policy and that the bureaucracy, military and the public held reservations did not concern Ozal.

Why Ozal was so enthusiastic is still highly debated. Because he died in 1993 without giving a full accounting of his rationale, speculation continues. Some suggest that Ozal concluded that an appreciative United States would reward Turkish participation with increased backing. Others believe that Ozal thought the impending war would change the existing boundaries of the Middle East and that he wanted Turkey at the negotiating table on the side of the victors. However, given Ozal's world view, his decision more likely came about because he believed that Turkey had reached a new stage in its development, one that allowed it to assume a more forceful position in regional affairs.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Mayall, *McNair Paper 56 – Turkey: Thwarted Ambition* (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1997), pp. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Morton I. Abramowitz, "Turkey After Ozal," in *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1993, 179.

This new position for Turkey was a direct result of changes in the international structure and the greater independence it allowed. Added to this, as Alan Makovsky argues, were a stronger Turkish economy, a more effective military, a decline in strength of neighboring states, and greater regional opportunity.<sup>29</sup> Although basically oriented towards Europe, Turkish foreign policy has adapted to regional and global changes. With its newfound opportunity and with a dynamic and forward looking leader, Turkey was set to embark on several foreign policy initiatives expanding out in many directions.

#### Central Asia and the Caucasus

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the "Turkic" republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus presented Turkey with a very unfamiliar position of being a provider of assistance rather than a recipient.<sup>30</sup> Being similar in language, culture and traditions and having relatively recently undergone democratization, liberalization and transformation from a state-planned, closed economy to an open market economy, Turkey was in a unique position to provide technical assistance and lessons learned from these experiences. Thus, Ankara became the first destination for many leaders of the new republics, as they believed Turkey was the country that best understood their problems. Having come at a time when Europe had turned its back on Turkey (discussed below), this newfound prestige was a much-welcomed boost for Turkey's national ego.

Enthusiasm for Turkey's "bold bid for leadership and influence in the region" often seemed to know no bounds.<sup>31</sup> Turkey embarked on a daring program of direct assistance and bilateral and

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<sup>29</sup> Alan Makovsky, "New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy," *SAIS Review*, Winter-Spring 1999, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Heath Lowry, "Challenges to Turkish Democracy in the Decade of the Nineties," in William Harris, et al., *Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1997), 106.

<sup>31</sup> Graham E. Fuller, "Turkey's New Eastern Orientation," in Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, eds., *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 68.



multilateral economic and political relations to assist these new republics in the transformation to democracies and establish the institutions and structures needed for them to adjust to international norms.

Turkey concluded over 160 protocols with the new republics and signed cooperative agreements in the areas of transportation, communications, agriculture and trade. There have been many high level financial and business contacts, cultural exchanges and student exchange programs. In 1992, Turkey created a new governmental organization called the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) whose sole purpose is to concentrate Turkey's efforts to assist these developing Central Asian republics. Additionally, Turkey has been active in enlisting the help of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others. However, expectations of a Turkic power bloc with Turkey at its center have been greatly exaggerated and the initiatives undertaken by Turkey have seen limited success.

Turkey's ambition in the region has been thwarted primarily because of its economic weakness and its constrained ability to provide the necessary infrastructural assistance. Another factor has been the rivalry for regional influence among Turkey, Iran and Russia; a battle which seems to have resulted in the reassertion of Russian influence. Furthermore, domestic tensions in the new republics and border disputes between them have destabilized the region and have hindered economic and political development.

#### Black Sea Region

Beginning in 1990, Turkey initiated a plan to link the littoral states of the Black Sea together in economic cooperation that would foster political stability and well being. This idea came to fruition at a summit in Istanbul on 25 June 1992, when the leaders of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine signed the declaration which brought the organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) into

official existence.<sup>32</sup> This declaration was described as “*above all an expression of the common will and determination of the Black Sea countries to embark on a new multilateral based on the principles of a market economy.*”<sup>33</sup>

Taking advantage of the change in the international system, these 11 countries sought to revitalize the Black Sea region through gradual development of the free circulation of capital, services, goods and labor. Turkey sought to transfer its experience in free market economics to the state-controlled economies of the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries. Additionally, economic complementarities would encourage trade among the Black Sea countries. For example, Russia and the Caucasian states have vast energy reserves while Turkey has a large industrial base and a large line of consumer goods. Turkey could provide expertise on management, privatization and tourism.

The nature of the BSEC is complimentary to European structures and is designed to be a European organization. Far from being an alternative to the European Union (EU), the founding members of the BSEC hope to encourage regional cooperation and economic development to foster better relations with the EU. In fact, it has been put forward that Turkey, in hoping to gain admittance into the EU, has initiated the BSEC to make its membership packet more attractive. Regardless of intent, Turkey has devoted much energy into the development of the BSEC.

Despite Turkey's efforts and expectations, the reality of the situation is that the region is not very technologically advanced, has limited supplies of hard currency and lacks accumulated capital. Although continuing dialog and regional cooperation inherent to the BSEC offers great potential for the future, the near-term prognosis is for economic stagnation.

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<sup>32</sup> N. Bulent Gultekin and Ayse Mumcu, “Black Sea Economic Cooperation” in Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, eds., *Turkey Between East and West* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

## Europe

One of the tenets of Turkey's national ideology since the founding of the republic has been to develop into a modern and civilized democracy seated alongside the great powers. This has taken and continues to take Turkey on a path towards Europe. Turkey has become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and many others European organizations. The European institution that has thus far alluded Turkey has been the European Union.

Turkey became an associate member of the European Council (predecessor of the EU) in 1964. Only in 1987 did Turkey apply for full membership. The EU's response to Turkey's membership bid was to postpone a decision until a later date. Much of Turkey's other foreign policy initiatives in the 1990's can be viewed as an attempt to make its membership application to the EU more attractive. However, the change in the international system reoriented Europe's security perspective and Turkey, who held significant strategic importance, was increasingly becoming viewed more as a Middle Eastern country with a European vocation rather than a European country contiguous with the Middle East. Thus as Turkey stressed its historical, cultural and religious similarities during the conduct of foreign policy initiatives toward other parts of the world, Europeans paid heed and realized Turkey's historical, cultural and religious otherness. The dramatic blow to Turkey's European candidacy came in 1997 when Turkey was not among the candidates for full membership. The fact that former Warsaw Pact members, who Turkey and her European allies spent the last fifty years of the Cold War confronting, were included made the European rebuff even more painful.

The goal of EU membership has been a longstanding priority for Turkey and the EU's rebuke caused deep anger. Despite the EU leaving open the prospects of a future Turkish membership, many Turks have concluded that Europe will never accept Turkey as an equal and desire a change in the orientation of Turkish foreign policy. Thus the freedom of maneuver characteristic of the

unipolar international system permitted Europe to exclude Turkey and now, to a certain extent, can allow Turkey to exclude Europe.

By refusing Turkey, the EU has lost much of its ability to influence Turkish foreign policy behavior. This becomes critical when explosive areas such as Cyprus, Turkish-Greek relations and Balkan issues are approached. Turkey's initiative for closer relations with Europe and the EU has been unsuccessful and to a certain degree counterproductive. In place of the amicable relations of the Cold War era, tense Turkish-European relations characterize the post-Cold War period.

### Middle East

The largest response Turkey initiated towards the Middle East was the aforementioned unequivocal policy against Saddam Hussein in 1990. Despite hesitancy on the part of the Turkish diplomatic and military establishments, Turgut Ozal's policy is seen as successful and as Andrew Mango states, it seems to have "*minimized losses (some of which were inevitable) and maximized benefits for Turkey.*"<sup>34</sup>

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, momentum built toward the Middle East peace process. Here Turkey was a vocal advocate and plays an integral part in many of the multilateral aspects of the accords; especially those dealing with economic development, water, and arms control issues. Turkey believes that peace is not only an important step toward regional stability but also that it will increase economic cooperation and create new opportunities for trade and investment. Turkey has given continuous support to the Palestinian Authority and was one of the first to extend diplomatic recognition to the Palestinians in 1988. Turkey established relations at the ambassadorial level and has offered help with housing and other infrastructure projects.

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mango, "Turkish policy in the Middle East," in Clement H. Dodd, ed., *Turkish Foreign Policy* (Wistow, England: Eothen Press, 1992), 65.

Again, despite high expectations, Turkey's initiatives towards the Middle East have had limited success. The major obstacle has been the faltering peace process and Turkey's relations with Israel. With the talks stalled, most of the multilateral and confidence building measures have not occurred. Additionally, mistrust on the part of Turkey's neighbors make it hard for them to accept Turkey's overtures as genuine. After the 1996 MTCA became public, the Leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria issued a joint statement demanding that Turkey reconsider the agreement.<sup>35</sup>

Turkey has hoped that peace between Israel and the Palestinians will free it from playing a difficult balancing act between its diplomatic, economic and military ties with Israel and its efforts to show solidarity with the Arabs and the Islamic world. Despite Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's efforts to deflect strong Arab criticism away from Turkey, many of the Arab states continue to criticize Turkey's dealing with Israel. At the Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting in Tehran in December 1998, Turkey received severe criticism prompting the Turkish delegation to leave the conference early. Other causes of Turkish mistrust will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

### Israel

Of the post-Cold War initiatives pursued by Turkey, relations with Israel have proven the most successful. This is not remarkable given Turkey and Israel's situation. Both Israel and Turkey have secular democracies, dynamic economies and strong militaries. Both suffer the threat of terrorism and have turbulent relations with their neighbors. Good relations with the United States are quite important for Turkey and Israel and both militaries are based on U.S. weaponry. For Turkish decision-makers, these commonalties make Israel a very pragmatic partner as the twenty-first Century approaches.

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<sup>35</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26 (Spring 1997), 6.

The main impetus behind growing ties is Turkey and Israel's relations with their regional neighbors. The signed agreements provide both countries enhanced security to the degree that a full defense alliance is unnecessary. The strategic objective of Turkish-Israeli cooperation does not appear to fight a war together but rather to deter war from occurring. In this manner, any potential aggressor against one party must account for the possible reaction of the other. This will become especially relevant as Turkey and Israel attempt to address their respective long-standing regional disputes. Chapter Three will detail the specific concerns of Turkey and Israel regarding their neighbors but as anyone with a cursory knowledge of the region is aware, the Middle East is rife with antagonisms.

Beyond the regional impetus, extra-regional concerns also account for the growing Turkish-Israeli cooperation. As mentioned earlier, both Turkey and Israel covet good relations with the United States. However, because of the change in the international system, the United States has taken a more balanced approach regarding Middle Eastern issues and no longer gives unconditional support to its "friends." Therefore, better Turkish-Israeli relations are also designed to alter Washington's perceptions towards Turkey and Israel. Additionally, Turkey, concerned about weakening ties with Europe, views closer relations with Israel as an effective counter to European disregard.

As we have seen, the international system dramatically changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The world moved from the relative stability associated with bipolarity to the more uncertain future of unipolarity. With varying degrees of success, Turkey responded to this change by altering its national outlook and has embarked on several foreign policy initiatives. The initiative offering Turkey the greatest immediate benefit is the growing cooperation with Israel. Turkey and Israel seem ideally suited to forge into the new millenium as partners. Although Turkey has maintained diplomatic relations with Israel for fifty years, only recently has cooperation advanced to the point where their closeness is being discussed as an alliance. The next chapter will review this relationship and determine how it has evolved to its present form.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **History of Turkish-Israeli Relations**

Relations between Turks and Jews extend back for centuries while, for obvious reasons, relations between the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel are much more recent. Turkish relations with Jews in general and Israel in particular are affected by a unique set of psychological conditions developed during Ottoman times and shaped by the Middle Eastern subsystem.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Turkey's pragmatic response to critical international and domestic events has greatly influenced previous policies of the Republic toward Israel and this pragmatism may be key to future policies. This chapter attempts to reveal the mutual sympathy held by Turks and Jews and to outline Turkey's diplomatic history regarding the State of Israel.

### **Foundations and Environment**

An incident that occurred over 500 years ago holds much credence with current events and creates a bond between Turks and Jews. It was in 1492 that Sultan Beyazid II welcomed to the Ottoman Empire the Jews from Spain and Portugal who were suffering persecution at the hands of the Christian Europeans. This act of generosity was not unique as the Ottoman Empire also later welcomed Jews fleeing Central Europe and pogroms in Russia. Thus, with the absorption of these refugees, the Ottoman Empire was host to the largest and most prosperous Jewish community in the world, incorporating Romaniote Jews who survived Byzantine times; Musta'rab Jews who dispersed from the Holy Land during Roman times and who prospered during the Islamic Caliphate of Baghdad; Sephardic Jews who fled from the Iberian Peninsula;

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<sup>1</sup> Ali Karaosmanoglu, "A Turkish View of Bilateral Relations with Israel," in Ali Ihsan Bagis, ed, *Actual Situation and Prospects of Turkey's Bilateral Relations with Israel* (Ankara: Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, 1992), 1.

and Ashkenazi Jews who came from Europe.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, within the empire, the Jewish Millet made significant contributions to Ottoman society in the fields of medicine, engineering and finance.<sup>3</sup> This has created a certain sympathy towards the descendants of the Ottomans by a people who have suffered persecution throughout their history. It is worth noting that of the three major non-Muslim minorities within the Empire (Jews, Greeks, and Armenians), only Jews escaped widespread persecution and killings in the waning years of the Ottoman polity.<sup>4</sup>

The Jewish community in Anatolia generally supported Turkey's War of Independence against Greece and the occupying Western Powers following World War One, and Rabbi Haim Nahum, a Jewish intellectual, served as an advisor to the Turkish delegation at Lausanne.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Turkish Republic provided refuge to many Jews escaping Nazi persecution during the 1930's.<sup>6</sup> This common history between Turks and Jews has given the citizens of Turkey and Israel a "*favorable psychological element [that] is an important asset for good relations.*"<sup>7</sup>

Competing with and complementing this favorable psychological outlook among Turks and Jews is Turkey and Israel's regional environment. Both are in the Middle Eastern subsystem and are affected by the developments of the region. More importantly, Turkey and Israel's bilateral relations cannot be isolated from the Middle East or from the Arab-Israeli dispute. Thus, the Middle Eastern subsystem is a limiting factor both on the extent to which Turkish-Israeli relations can develop and on the pace of that development.

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<sup>2</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Walter F. Weiker, *Ottoman, Turks and the Jewish Polity* (Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, 1992), chap. 4 passim.

<sup>4</sup> Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece. Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1987), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Karaosmanoglu, 2.

<sup>6</sup> The Turkish Republic took in thousands of Jewish refugees including many leading professors, physicians, attorneys and artists. Many were given senior positions at Istanbul University and other faculties. For more information, see Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Karaosmanoglu, 2.



In an area where monarchs and despots characterize national governments, Turkey and Israel, despite obvious flaws, stand alone as the Middle East's only democracies and both have secular forms of government. Turkey and Israel are non-Arab and also possess a Western orientation complete with Western values and formal and informal alliances with the West. In the economic arena, Turkey and Israel are industry oriented and have market economies. These similarities create a certain amount of mutual understanding among the two nations but also creates a problem of regional legitimacy within the Middle Eastern subsystem.

The Arabs tend to view Turkey and Israel as intruders – Turkey having an imperial past and Israel being an occupying power. Turkey and Israel's relations with the region's other members will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three but in order to understand Turkish and Israeli relations which are addressed in this chapter, the reader must be aware that Arabs have always tended to alienate Turkey and Israel from the Middle East and that to a certain degree, Turkey and Israel have also tried to distance themselves from the perceived backwardness and troubles of the Middle East. The following discussion on Turkey and Israel's shared diplomatic history demonstrates this well.

### **Beginning Relations: The Supremacy of Security**

This discussion will focus on relations between the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel. Although there was contact between the Republic of Turkey and the Jews of Palestine, these relations are not overly relevant to this discussion. It is important to note, however, that the Ottomans, predecessors to the Republic, were against Zionism. This was not necessarily directed against the Jews per se, but rather an attempt to quell the various nationalist movements that were within the empire.<sup>8</sup> Having noted this, the discussion begins with the Republic of Turkey and its response to the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine.

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<sup>8</sup> Nachmani, 9.

The Republic of Turkey was formed out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. Turkey was a fairly weak state but under the strong leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey managed to establish its sovereignty and create the institutions of a functioning nation-state. Ataturk's successor, Ismet Inonu, successfully maneuvered to maintain Turkish neutrality during World War Two until very near the end of that war when the outcome was all but certain. Thus, when Turkey did break their neutrality in 1945 and entered the war on the side of the victors, Turkey attained some international prestige and was a founding member of the newly formed United Nations. Despite these moves however, Turkey's position was still quite tenuous in the immediate post-war years. Because Turkey bordered the Soviet Union and had control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle Straits, which the Soviets coveted, Turkey's territory and sovereignty came under increasing pressure from the Communists. The East-West conflict was at an early stage and Turkey was in need of a patron to counter the Soviet advances. Turkey, desperate to maintain its sovereignty, looked to Britain and the United States for help. Thus, this is the setting when the vote to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab entities came before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1947.

Despite maintaining an official stance of neutrality on Palestine, Turkey made its position known when it voted against the partition of Palestine in the UNGA on 29 November 1947. Although the Partition plan passed with a substantial majority, Turkey stood firm within the Arab bloc. Many at the time were convinced that Turkey voted in this manner because of Islamic solidarity, however, a more appropriate observation would be to conclude that Turkey desired the continuation of the status quo for fear of instability in the region.<sup>9</sup>

Security was of primary concern for the leaders of Turkey. Historic Turkish fears of expansionist Russia and current aggressive Soviet overtures towards Turkey made issues of territorial integrity and national sovereignty paramount. Turkey believed that partition would

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<sup>9</sup> George E. Gruen, *Turkey, Israel and the Palestine Question, 1948-1960: A Study in the Diplomacy of Ambivalence*, doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1970, 40.

create confusion and the withdrawal of British forces would create a power vacuum.<sup>10</sup> In the Turks' mind, this would feed into the Soviet tactic of increasing instability and unrest causing chaos that would foster the spread of communism.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it was uncertain at the time what type of government a Jewish state would establish. Given the large amount of Jews of Russian origin in the leadership of the Zionist movement and the existence of socialist institutions like the kibbutz, the Turks (and many others) feared that the new Jewish state could very well be a communist state. Thus, desiring the continuance of the British presence in Palestine as an obstacle against the establishment of a Soviet bridgehead in the Middle East, Turkey voted against partition in 1947 primarily for the pragmatic reason of enhancing its own security and not because of Islamic solidarity.

Why then would Turkey change course in 1949 and be the first Muslim country to recognize the new state of Israel? The answer is simple – pragmatism. By 1949, the State of Israel was an established fact. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. (interestingly not Britain or France) had extended recognition and the Arab countries, by accepting a truce with Israel on 10 June 1948, had in effect given de facto recognition. Another important factor in Ankara's decision was the results of the 25 January 1949 Israeli elections. Prime Minister Ben Gurion's pro-Western Mapai Party emerged as the winner while the expansionist Herut Party and the Communist Party had a rather poor showing. These results assured Turkish leaders that Israel was not a Soviet satellite but rather was a "*viable, peaceful and relatively powerful force in the region.*"<sup>12</sup> On 28 March 1949, Turkey extended de facto recognition to the State of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Although fully aware that extending recognition to Israel would incur the anger of Arab countries, Turkey concluded that good relations with Israel would produce tangible benefits; both

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ismail Soysal, *Türk Dis Politikası 1919-1993* (Istanbul: Eren, 1993), 64.

directly and in terms of Turkey's enhanced standing within the Western community.<sup>14</sup> The direct benefit of relations with Israel was trade relations. In 1948, Israel produced less than half the food needed for the Jewish population. Turkey went far to fulfill Israel's needs in produce and agricultural products. However, recognition of Israel came at a time when the concern for a security guarantee was uppermost in Ankara's mind.

Security considerations directed the orientation of Turkish foreign policy from 1945 to 1952 and because of this, Turkey voted against the partition of Palestine in 1947. These same security concerns were paramount when Turkey recognized Israel in 1949. As already mentioned, Turkey was under considerable pressure from the Soviet Union and was looking for assistance from the Western powers. The United States, under the Truman Doctrine, had given Turkey words of commitment for protection from Soviet aggression but this was far from a guarantee and Turkey remained vulnerable. The leaders of Turkey, impressed by the power of American Jewry on the U.S. government, were convinced that Israel could act as an advocate for Turkey's interests in Washington.<sup>15</sup> Thus, recognizing Israel to be a significant factor in helping to convince Washington to admit Turkey into the newly formed Atlantic alliance must have been a dominant factor in Turkey's decision to recognize Israel. In this manner, Turkey's alignment with the West played a leading role in the development of Turkish-Israeli relations.

The unique environment of the Middle Eastern subsystem required Turkey to act cautiously in developing diplomatic relations with Israel. Although Turkey established *de facto* recognition in March 1949, permanent representation in Tel Aviv was not established until January 1950. The first Turkish mission in Israel was at the level of "legation" and not "embassy" and the first representative was not an "ambassador" or "minister" but rather a "charge d'affairs."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gruen, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Nachmani, 50.

<sup>16</sup> The first Turkish representative to Israel was Seyfullah Esin who held the personal rank of Minister but served in the position of Charge d'Affairs.

For Israel's part, the leaders were very optimistic about developing relations with the "*most progressive country in the Middle East.*"<sup>17</sup> It was hoped that Turkey's influence in Asia and the Middle East would enhance Israel's international standing and might even lead the Arabs to make peace.<sup>18</sup> Israel's choice for representation was the ranking Israeli specialist on the politics of the Middle East, Eliahu Sasson.<sup>19</sup>

Relations between Turkey and Israel quickly warmed and in March 1950, Turkey raised its recognition of Israel from "*de facto*" to "*de jure*." This made little practical difference, but it did symbolize Ankara's recognition of the mutual interest between the two countries.<sup>20</sup> Beside diplomatic relations, commercial and cultural ties were also warming. A major trade agreement was being negotiated and Istanbul's popular Fenerbahce soccer team made a tour of Israel. El Al, Israel's national airline, began biweekly and then weekly flights to Istanbul and the Turkish State Maritime Administration began regular passenger service to Haifa.<sup>21</sup> While relations progressed, events in the domestic Turkish scene caused some reasons for concern.

On 14 May 1950, the Democrat Party (DP) overwhelmingly defeated the Peoples Republican Party (CHP) in Turkey's first freely contested elections. The success of the DP was due in large part to its appeal to the religious vote in Anatolia. Additionally, DP leaders departed from the CHP on foreign issues and advocated a more active foreign policy of promoting, rather than ignoring, ties with its neighbors to the east and southeast.<sup>22</sup> What, at the time, were concerns for the future of Turkish-Israeli relations were quickly found to be misplaced as the DP made its position clear.

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<sup>17</sup> Gruen, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Israel's representation at its legation in Ankara was at the level of Minister, a level higher than that of Charge d'Affairs.

<sup>20</sup> Gruen, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 24.

The new administration with Adnan Menderes as Prime Minister and M. Fuat Koprulu as foreign minister embarked on an active effort to placate the West and secure a position for Turkey in NATO. The Turks continued to perceive Israel as an important voice in advocating Turkey's position in Washington and this, coupled with the genuine affinity growing between Ankara and Tel Aviv, led Turkey's new leadership to increase their representation in Israel from Chargé to that of Minister merely one month after coming to power. In July 1950, another important event occurred as Turkey and Israel signed a new trade agreement. Thus, the new Menderes regime not only maintained the previous administration's sense of importance on relations with Israel but even went further to promote cooperation.

For Israel, such actions by a member of the region helped assure Israel's viability and strengthen its industrial development. For example, in the early 1950's, Turkish exports satisfied Israel's entire requirement for cotton and 50% of its consumption of wheat.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Turkey exported various other agricultural products. In return, Israel exports to Turkey included pharmaceuticals, appliances and building materials.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as George Gruen states, *"if Turkish diplomatic recognition had enabled Israel to cut through the ring of political isolation formed by the so called 'Arab-Islamic bloc,' the establishment of formal trade relations with Turkey opened a serious breach in the wall of economic boycott by which the Arabs hoped to cause the internal collapse of the state they had been unable to defeat by armed force."*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nachmani, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gruen, 147.

### **Alliance Building: Security Remains Paramount**

It may be beneficial at this time to review Turkey's strategic foreign policy goals. As stated earlier, in the immediate post-war years, Turkey desperately sought Western help in countering the Soviet threat. In seeking this security guarantee from the West, Menderes acted swiftly in committing Turkish troops to the U.S. led effort in Korea (only two months after coming to power). This immediate Turkish support along with the tenacious manner in which the Turkish soldiers fought, went far in demonstrating Turkey's commitment to the West. In 1952, partly as compensation for services rendered, Turkey was granted membership into NATO. With its security guaranteed, Turkey was now in a position to help the West coordinate a Middle East alliance on the pattern of NATO to encircle the Soviet Union. This would prove difficult as most of the Arab countries professed an official position of neutrality in the East-West conflict.

The first attempt for a regional alliance occurred in 1951 involving Turkey and the Middle East's most important Arab country, Egypt. However, because of Turkey's relations with Israel and the high degree of Arab distrust of Turkey, this attempt at forming a Middle East Command failed. Likewise, hopes for a Middle Eastern Defense Organization failed to materialize and Menderes grew cautious about the feasibility of establishing a defense pact with the Arab states. However, the United States, taking a stauncher stand against communism, launched its "new look" foreign policy and in 1955, Iraqi strongman Nuri Said joined Turkey in a treaty of cooperation and mutual assistance. This agreement, known as the Baghdad Pact, expanded to include Turkey, Iraq, Britain, Iran and Pakistan.

Turkish foreign policy at this time had a significant impact on the region and the 1955 Baghdad Pact was a critical event in the Middle East. One direct and immediate repercussion was the 1955 Czech arms deal with Egypt. By using hostile rhetoric against Britain, the colonial power, and by attacking the Baghdad Pact, Egyptian President Abdal Nasser gained much political capital from his Arab compatriots. By completing the arms deal, Nasser not only gave the Soviets their first access into the region but also became the dominant political personality in

the Middle East. This was quite disturbing to the West and to Western oriented countries like Turkey, Israel, Iran and Iraq.

Attempting to lessen the threat of Nasser and to maintain a colonial presence, Britain, France and Israel joined forces against Egypt in the Suez Crisis of 1956. The unexpected response of the United States against this operation left the three aggressor states discredited and gave Nasser an incredible political victory despite the military defeat. The actions of Britain, France and Israel seemed to give proof to Arab charges that the Baghdad Pact was an imperial tool designed to impose Western domination on the Middle East. Turkey was not only an ally of Britain through the Baghdad Pact and through NATO, but also maintained good relations with Israel. This left Turkey in a difficult position.

After much deliberation, Turkey followed the lead of the United States and condemned the Suez operation. However, Turkey would remain in the Baghdad Pact and, despite maintaining normal relations with both Britain and France, recalled its minister from Tel Aviv.<sup>26</sup> Seeing Nasserism and Nasser's overtures to the Soviet Union as the biggest threats to the region, Turkey took the symbolic step of reducing its representation in Tel Aviv to the level of Charge d'Affaires. This, they hoped, would deflect Arab criticism while, at the same time, support Western-oriented leaders like Nuri Said. This did give the Arabs the initial impression that Turkey realized its mistake in recognizing Israel but later events would prove differently.

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<sup>26</sup> The wording of the proclamation condemning Israel is quite interesting. It does not specifically mention Israel but rather Tel Aviv. It also states that diplomatic relations would be restored only after the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is resolved. This led many in Turkey to claim that the Arabs and Iraq heavily influenced Menderes.



### The Peripheral Pact: Mutual Threats

Upon his return to Turkey in December 1956, reporters asked Turkey's former minister in Tel Aviv, Sefkati Istinyeli, if his return meant that Turkey was breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel. He replied, "*Absolutely nothing has changed.*"<sup>27</sup> This proved true as the Turkish legation continued to function normally and saw many experienced diplomats with the personal rank of "Ambassador" posted to Tel Aviv in the position of "Charge d'Affairs."<sup>28</sup> Regional crisis would continue to shape Turkish-Israeli relations as the events of 1958 demonstrate.

On 1 February 1958, Syria joined with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic with Abdal Nasser as its leader. On 14 July 1958, the monarchy in Iraq was overthrown and Nuri Said and the royal family were brutally murdered. Also in July, the civil war in Lebanon prompted the United States, using Turkish airfields, to send 15,000 Marines to Lebanon to aid Lebanese President Chamoun in countering Nasser-inspired Arab nationalists. Adding to the July turmoil, 24 Soviet divisions conducted maneuvers near the Turkish border. Turkey felt understandably threatened and reached out to another threatened Middle Eastern state – Israel.

The events of 1958 prompted Turkey to reorient its relations with Israel. There was a definite warming of relations in 1958 but the extent of Turkish-Israeli cooperation is not known since practically all sources for the era remain classified. There is however, speculation regarding the degree to which Turkey and Israel conspired. Michael Bar-Zohar, the official biographer of David Ben Gurion, chronicles the events that led to the establishment of what he terms a "Peripheral Pact" comprising Israel, Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia.<sup>29</sup> According to Bar-Zohar, Ben Gurion established a clandestine alliance that formed a ring around the Arab Middle East.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gruen, 358.

<sup>28</sup> Ekrem Guvendiren, *A Concise Report on Turkish-Israeli Relations* (Istanbul: Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey, 1999), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, trans. Peretz Kidron (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 264.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

This "specter-like" organization encompassed Israel in the West, Turkey and Iran in the North and East, and Ethiopia in the South.

Fear of a Soviet-supported Nasser led Israel to establish an unwritten understanding with Iran and Ethiopia by January 1958. The aforementioned upheaval that struck the Middle East in the summer of 1958 convinced Turkish leaders to strengthen their ties with Israel. Thus, the stage was set for the creation of the Peripheral Pact.

Ben Gurion knew the significance of this unofficial alliance and wanted to obtain Western support. He described his thinking in the following terms:

Israel sensed that she had something to offer the Americans. She was no longer a small, isolated country, but the leader and connecting link of states (one of which belonged to NATO and two which were members of the Baghdad Pact) whose population exceeded that of all the Arab nations together. They were also prepared to go a long way in collaborating with the Americans against Soviet designs in the region.<sup>31</sup>

Seeking to enlist support from the United States, Ben Gurion sent a 4-page letter on 24 July 1958 to President Eisenhower outlining for the first time his idea of a "Peripheral Pact." This letter, declassified in 1988, presents Ben Gurion's views on the threats in the region and then states the following:

We have begun to strengthen our links with four neighboring countries on the outer ring of the Middle East – Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia and Turkey – with the object of establishing a strong dam against the Nasserist-Soviet torrent. ... We have established relations of mutual trust and friendship with the Government of Iran, with the Prime Minister of Sudan ... and with the Emperor of Ethiopia. Recently, our links with the Government of Turkey have grown more intimate in secret channels, apart from and beyond our regular diplomatic relations.

Our object is the creation of a group of countries, not necessarily in formal and public alliance, which by mutual assistance and joint efforts, in political, economic, and other fields, will be able to stand up steadfastly against Soviet expansion through Nasser, and which might even be able to save the freedom of Lebanon and perhaps, in the course of time of Syria too.<sup>32</sup>

After outlining Israel's ability to execute such a scheme, Ben Gurion continues:

...[W]e can carry out the mission ... since ... it is a vital necessity for us as well as a source of perceptible strength to the West in this part of the world. ... But two things are necessary: United States support – political, financial and moral; and the inculcation of a feeling in Iran, Turkey, Sudan and Ethiopia that our efforts in this direction enjoy the support of the United States.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>32</sup> *Dwight D. Eisenhower; Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61* (Ann Whitman File), International Series Box 36, Mid East, 24 July 1958, declassified E.O. 12356, sec. 8.4(b), MR 86-462 #2 by DJH 23 September 1988. Letter dated 24 July 1958 from Ben Gurion to Eisenhower.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The next day, Eisenhower delivered his response by means of a telegram. In his reply, the American President stated that “*I am deeply impressed by the breadth of your insight ...*” but he did not appear overly enthusiastic about Ben Gurion’s plan.<sup>34</sup> The president closed the letter by stating “*I have discussed your letter with the Secretary of State, who will be writing you in more detail.*”<sup>35</sup> Ben Gurion must have been disappointed by this response as he awaited word from Secretary of State Dulles.

On the morning of 27 July 1958, Secretary Dulles had a secret meeting with Abba Eban, Israeli Ambassador to the United States, where they discussed the contacts that Israel had established with Peripheral Pact countries and America’s ability to assist Israel.<sup>36</sup> This may have been the occasion referenced by Bar-Zohar where Dulles expressed a “*favorable opinion and encouraged the prime minister to establish the Peripheral Pact.*”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, with the encouragement of the United States, Ben Gurion set off on a secret nocturnal flight to Ankara on 28 August 1958 to secure a deal with the Turks.<sup>38</sup> At a meeting the next morning, Prime Ministers Ben Gurion and Menderes discussed cooperation in explaining to Western leaders the dangers of Nasser’s expansionist politics; assistance to Ethiopia and Iran against Nasserist and communist subversion; Israeli assistance to Turkey in industrialization; joint scientific research; and the extension of trade between the two countries.<sup>39</sup> That night, after the meetings, Ben Gurion embarked on a clandestine return trip after successfully concluding the secret alliance.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Dwight D. Eisenhower; Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61* (Ann Whitman File), International Series Box 36, Cable, 25 July 1958, declassified E.O. 12356, sec. 3.8(b), MR 81-148 #1 by JW 1 June 1982. Telegram, dated 25 July 1958 from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben Gurion.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Dwight D. Eisenhower; Papers as President of the United States, 1953-6*, International Series Box 36, Mid East, Personal and Private, declassified State 8902482, MR 89-256 #2. Incoming telegram, dated 27 July 1958, from Secretary Dulles to the President.

<sup>37</sup> Bar-Zohar, 264.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

The Peripheral Pact was long lasting according to Ben Gurion's biographer. Bar Zohar offers as evidence the fact that in 1960, the Shah of Iran stated that he supported the Democratic Party in the upcoming U.S. elections because within the Democratic Party, "*Jews possess considerable influence and Iran is interested in the consolidation of this influence because of her close ties with Israel.*"<sup>41</sup> Additionally, after an attempted coup against the Emperor of Ethiopia on 14 December 1960, Bar Zohar reveals that supporters of the emperor sent out radio transmissions stating "*a coup is threatening the throne, alert the Israelis.*"<sup>42</sup> He further suggests that links with Turkey did not weaken despite the military intervention removing Menderes from office.

Amikam Nachmani, Professor of Political Science at Bar-Ilan University, goes further than Bar-Zohar by claiming that within the Jerusalem-Ankara axis, there was definite military cooperation. He claims that part of the agreement was for Israel to export military equipment to Turkey and in return "*receive the support of the Turkish 'giant' and its army.*"<sup>43</sup> Nachmani further argues that there were contingency plans between Turkey and Israel for joint military actions should the British base at Aden fall into Nasser's hands.<sup>44</sup> While this aspect may be difficult to verify because of the scarcity of declassified documentation on this subject, Nachmani's assertions are a logical step for these threatened Western-oriented allies.

The decade from 1948-58 began with timid Turkish recognition of Israel and ended with a complete, albeit unofficial, alliance. Regional threats, mutual fears and pragmatism brought these two countries together. During the 1950's, Turkey's alignment with the West and the supremacy of Turkey's security dilemma greatly influenced Turkish policy towards Israel. Despite officially reducing diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1956 Suez Crisis, Turkey continued normal relations and even expanded them as the Peripheral Pact indicates. The next decade, that of the 1960s would be quite different.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Nachmani, 75.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

### **Cracks in the Western Alliance**

During the turbulent decade of the sixties, Turkey's position became more complex. Turkish-Israeli relations were always a function of Turkey's relations with the United States as the above discussion indicates. Thus, when Turkish-American relations began to falter, so did Turkish-Israeli relations. It is therefore important to discuss the deteriorating Turkish-U.S. relations as a limiting factor on Turkey's relations with Israel. Domestic changes as well as international crisis produced diminished relations with the United States and will be discussed in turn.

### **Turkish Domestic Changes**

Sharp divisions between the ruling Democratic Party and the opposition People's Republican Party arose as a result of the Menderes Administration's domestic and foreign policies. Ismet Inonu, leader of the opposition criticized Menderes' blind alignment with the West and his disregard for Turkey's own unique national security issues. Inonu disliked the patron-client relationship that had developed between the U.S. and Turkey and desired a more mature relationship between two sovereign nations. Inonu and the military were equally critical of Menderes' domestic policies, which they believed undermined democratic processes. The DP maintained control, they argued, by suppressing opposition parties, the press, universities and intellectual discourse. The struggle by the opposition and the consequent countermeasures of the DP resulted in political and social turmoil prompting the military to intervene on 27 May 1960.

By seizing power, the military changed the course of Turkish democracy and not only executed Menderes and two others but also created a new constitution, passed by national referendum, that was designed to prevent any one party from assuming a monopoly of power. The 1961 constitution gave unprecedented freedoms to the universities, the media and contained a

full bill of civil liberties.<sup>45</sup> The military retained power until the general election of 15 October 1961, which brought Inonu back into power serving as prime minister.

Inonu's administration faced new challenges in the post-coup era as the 1961 constitution made popular public support a more important factor in developing policy than in the past. This had a direct effect on foreign policy issues. The emphasis on religion increased as did a desire to improve relations with the Arabs. Parallel to this, Inonu wanted to develop a proper balance between Turkey's alignment with the West and its own national interests. Subsequent American actions would dramatically demonstrate justification for Inonu's concerns.

### International Imperatives

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 brought Turkey into the international spotlight. Turkey, as a NATO power, received from the United States several medium-range Jupiter nuclear missiles in 1959. These missiles were out-dated but they served to assure Turkey of its importance in NATO and also symbolized the alliance's resolve to protect Turkey from a Soviet attack. However, the Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in an agreement whereby the United States agreed to remove these missiles in exchange for an immediate Soviet withdrawal of its missiles from Cuba. Turkey's prestige took a serious blow, for Washington had concluded this deal without having consulted its Turkish ally. Despite assurances from the U.S. that Turkey remained under the "nuclear umbrella" by submarine based missiles, Turkey understandably felt dejected and angered by first the disclosure of what had been a secret and then the manner in which it occurred. Thus, the Cuban Missile Crisis supported the impression that Turkey's relationship with the United States was that of patron-client and that, despite being a member of NATO, Turkey could be sacrificed without regard. While the Cuban Missile Crisis left Turkey questioning its relations with the United States, the Cyprus Crisis of 1964 fully exposed the limitations of the relationship.

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<sup>45</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, rev. ed. (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 257.

Violations of the Cypriot constitution pushed Turkey to consider intervening militarily on behalf of the large ethnic Turkish population on the island of Cyprus in 1964. When Turkey informed the U.S. of its intentions, the American response was immediate. In his letter to Inonu, which was described as "*the diplomatic equivalent of an atomic bomb*,"<sup>46</sup> President Johnson warned against any Turkish intervention and called into question NATO's security guarantee should the Soviet Union become involved. Johnson's warning effectively deterred the Turks from intervening but it also had the significant effect of dramatically altering Turkish thinking - no longer would Turkey give automatic diplomatic support to Washington. Turkish leaders came to the sober realization that solely relying on the U.S. and NATO could no longer solve Turkey's complex political, military and economic problems.

Cyprus continued to be an irritant for Turkey and further exposed gaps between U.S. and Turkish interests. A "colonels coup" overthrew the government in Athens in 1967 and this military junta sought Cypriot union with Greece (enosis). Tensions on the island mounted as ethnic terrorism produced many casualties. When, in 1974, the junta in Athens sponsored a coup d'etat on Cyprus to enact enosis, the Turkish government acted immediately and in keeping with its status as a guarantor to the Treaty of London and Zurich. Not repeating the actions of 1964, Turkey quickly conducted a major military operation on Cyprus effectively dividing the island and protecting the lives of thousands of Turkish Cypriots. The international community questioned Turkey's motives and because Turkey used American-made equipment in the operation, the United States responded by enacting an arms embargo on Turkey.

The U.S. arms embargo started a new trend in Turkish-U.S. relations. Using its power to deny foreign military sales and transfers, the United States Congress, a diverse body of government susceptible to the pressures of special interest groups, was responsible for imposing the ban. Friction subsequently arose between the executive branch, which is responsible for the conduct of

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<sup>46</sup> H. W. Brands, *Into the Labyrinth. The United States and the Middle East, 1945-1993* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) : 97, quoted in George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York, 1977), 350.

foreign policy, and the legislative branch. For the Turks, Congress increasingly proved unreliable and this not only limited relations during the period of the arms embargo but also continues to this day.

The arms embargo marked the nadir in Turkish-U.S. relations and would have consequences in other arenas. The following discussion seeks to demonstrate how the deterioration of Turkish-U.S. relations and lack of international support on Turkey's position on Cyprus directly effected Turkey's approach to regional affairs and Israel.

### **Turkey and the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

The 1964 Cyprus Crisis began three persistent trends. First, it gave Marxist movements within Turkey an issue with which to condemn Turkey's Western orientation and begin anti-American movements; second, it presented the Soviet Union an opening with which to approach Turkey for better relations; and third, it caused Turkey to broaden its foreign interests by seeking diplomatic support in the Third World and an increase in its ties with Europe.<sup>47</sup> These trends, combined with the changes in its domestic scene, redirected Turkish foreign policy and served as limiting factors on Turkish-Israeli relations.

Turkey's Middle East policy ceased to be a function of its pro-American alignment and its relations with Israel and the Arab states demonstrated this. While Turkey's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict was difficult because each of the belligerents had their own superpower patron, Turkey successfully executed a flexible, diversified and importantly, an independent policy.<sup>48</sup> Turkey began a pro-European rather than a pro-American approach to issues thus maintaining their Western identification while retaining individual freedom of movement. Turkey adopted a foreign policy based on non-interference in a sovereign country's internal matters and maintained

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<sup>47</sup> George S. Harris, *Turkey. Coping with Crisis* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 190.

<sup>48</sup> Orhan Soysal, 'An Analysis of the Influences of Turkey's Alignment with the West and the Arab-Israeli Conflict upon Turkish-Israeli and Turkish-Arab Relations, 1947-77,' unpublished doctoral thesis, Princeton University, 1983, 320.



neutrality on inter-state conflicts. This included a more neutral stance on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Turkey maintained relations with Israel but kept them quiet and limited in order not to offend Arab sensibilities.<sup>49</sup>

Events leading to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and Turkey's response to that war demonstrate well the manner in which this more balanced policy worked. Turkey did not condemn the actions of Nasser when he closed the Suez Canal to all Israeli ship traffic in May 1967. When hostilities did break out in June, Turkey again showed its neutrality by denying a U.S. request to use Turkey's Incirlik Air Force Base to resupply Israel (Turkey had so obliged the Americans during the 1958 Lebanon operation). After the war, Turkey voted in favor of UN Resolution 242, which called for the return of occupied territory and also asserted the right for all regional states to live within secure and recognized borders. By maintaining neutrality, Turkey was able "to express sympathies toward the Arab states involved in the war without offending Israel."<sup>50</sup> Turkey's neutrality, however, was very short-lived as the continuing Cyprus issue demanded Turkey to favor the more numerous Arab states over Israel.

The Turkish Cypriot situation was not unlike that of the Arabs in Palestine where two distinct groups were trying to live on the same piece of land. Seeking diplomatic support for its position on Cyprus in the UN and in the international arena, Turkey proceeded with a concerted effort to appease the Arabs. This effectively ended Turkish neutrality in the Arab-Israeli dispute as Turkey began to favor her Arab neighbors. The oil embargo following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War further added an economic necessity to Turkish support for the Arabs at the expense of Israel.

Turkey symbolically abandoned its neutrality during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War by allowing the Soviet Union to use its airspace to supply the belligerent Arab states. As economic imperatives became paramount, Turkey voted with the Arab states supporting a 1975 UN

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>50</sup> Robins, 78, quoted in Ferenc A. Vali, *Bridge over the Bosphorus* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 308.

resolution labeling Zionism as racism and Turkey also recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the exclusive representative of the Palestinians. Turkey further courted Arab favors by becoming a member of the Islamic Conference Organization in 1976. The 1979 Camp David Agreement which brought peace between Israel and Egypt could have given Turkey an opportunity for a more balanced approach but witnessing the ferocity with which the other Arab states denounced Egypt, Turkey maintained her pro-Arab stance. Additionally, by the end of the decade, oil prices were again escalating and economic pressures increasingly persuaded Turkey to maintain its pro-Arab policy.

Even dire regional upheavals like the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not cause Turkey to break with the courtship of her Arab neighbors and adopt a more balanced policy. When, in 1980, the Israeli Knesset passed the bill that officially annexed all of Jerusalem, Ankara forcefully protested and not only closed its Consulate-General in Jerusalem but also lowered its representation in Israel from Charge d'Affaires to the level of Second Secretary.<sup>51</sup>

All links with Israel were reduced as practically the entire legation staff was withdrawn. The Military Attaches, Political and Economic officers as well as the cultural representatives all returned to Ankara.<sup>52</sup> Turkish Airlines cancelled its flights to Tel Aviv, the Turkish Maritime Lines stopped service to Israel and even cultural relations between universities came to an end.<sup>53</sup>

Just as the U.S. arms embargo marked the low-point in Turkish-American relations, the Jerusalem Law predicated Turkey and Israel's nadir. This situation however would not persist. Turkey could ill afford bad relations with the leader of the Western bloc or to remain distanced from the region's strongest military power.

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<sup>51</sup> Guvendiren, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

### **Mending Fences: Reconciliation with the U.S. and Israel**

The movement of closer Turkish relations with the U.S. on one track and closer relations with Israel on another track during the 1940s and 1950s was mirrored by parallel movements of bad relations on both tracks during the 1960s and 1970s. The influence of Turkish-American relations on Turkish-Israeli relations is quite substantial and when the former deteriorates, likewise the later. The converse is also true. The decade of the 1980s brought improved Turkish-U.S. relations and by the middle of the decade, Turkish-Israeli relations were on an improved course.

#### Better Relations with the United States

Despite the tensions in its relations with the United States, Turkey maintained its pro-Western alignment throughout. President Carter was successful in countering congressional opposition to Turkey and the arms embargo was lifted in 1978. The overthrow of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 suddenly made Turkey more strategically important. Turkey and the United States signed a new Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement in 1980, thus restoring relations that had deteriorated because of the Cyprus issue. This agreement was unique in that it was quite comprehensive, incorporating a breadth of defense and economic issues, and, at the same time, treated Turkey, not as a subordinate, but rather as an equal.

It was at this time, however, that the Turkish military again assumed power. Citing civilian ineptitude to solve Turkey's major political, economic and social problems, the Turkish generals, led by Kenan Evren, took over the government on 12 September 1980. While the world, and especially Europe, criticized Turkey's departure from democracy, the United States felt a sympathetic understanding for the generals' reasons.<sup>54</sup> Thus, as Turkey received international

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<sup>54</sup> Harris, 198.

condemnation, relations with the United States improved and the U.S. again became the center of Turkey's foreign policy structure.<sup>55</sup>

Relations with the United States steadily improved and was topped with total Turkish support for the U.S.-led effort against Saddam Hussein mentioned in Chapter One. Relations with Israel were also on the mend but would have to wait until the return of civilian rule. The following discussion reviews Turkey's changed economic picture, her disappointment with the Arabs and the movements toward better relations with Israel.

#### Better Relations with Israel

Turkey had strongly favored the Arabs in return for better economic relations and hoped for diplomatic support on the Cyprus issue. As the 1980s progressed, Turkey's economic picture brightened while, simultaneously, Arab diplomatic support for Turkey's position on Cyprus failed to materialize. The need for a pro-Arab foreign policy thus decreased and relations with Israel could progress.

Economically, Turkey's position dramatically improved in the 1980's. The Iran-Iraq War, which began in 1980 and lasted eight years, benefited Turkey tremendously as she increased trade to both parties. The United States assisted by giving aid and using its position to influence the International Monetary Fund in providing economic relief to Turkey. Oil prices were also on the decline and lessened Turkey's acute energy crisis. Additionally, changes by Turgut Ozal began the transformation of Turkey's moribund state-controlled economy into a dynamic market economy. These changes in its economic situation put Turkey in a stronger position to again conduct a more balanced Middle East foreign policy.

Diplomatically, Turkey failed to receive support for Cyprus from the Arabs. When the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was formed in 1983, no Arab or Muslim country

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

voiced support and Turkey remained the only country to recognize the TRNC. The Arabs likened the proclamation of the TRNC to the creation of Israel – a country formed by military strength and outside interference. Therefore, Arab disregard put an end to Turkey's courtship.

Additionally, as Turkey's economic position became stronger she reverted back to her balanced Middle East policy and neutrality in the Arab-Israeli dispute. As early as 1982, Turkey demonstrated a more realistic foreign policy by abstaining from a vote on a UN resolution condemning Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights. Turgut Ozal, in 1983, said that maintaining contacts with Israel was necessary and that in order for Turkey "to play a role in solving the problems of the Middle East [that] window must be kept open."<sup>56</sup>

In 1986, Turkey and Israel quietly raised the level of the diplomatic representatives to that of Charge d'Affaires. Economic and commercial relations began to develop and prosper with tourism becoming the fastest growing sector. Relations again were becoming normalized and it happened at an opportune time for Turkey.

Armed Kurdish insurrection in Turkey's southeast by the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK was becoming very serious and Turkey approached Israel for help. There is speculation that Turkey and Israel have conspired on intelligence sharing since Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and, since terrorism effected and continues to effect both Turkey and Israel, intelligence sharing on matters of terrorism seems highly probable.

Turkey's position in the Gulf War also bettered relations with Israel. For the first time in history, Turkey and Israel were siding with the United States against an Arab country. The person most responsible for Turkey's position was President Turgut Ozal. Under Ozal's leadership, Turkey embarked on an aggressive foreign policy, a policy where Israel figured high.

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the Arab-Israeli peace process gained momentum. After the Palestine Liberation Organization's implicit recognition of Israel in 1988 and the softening of the

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<sup>56</sup> Aykan, Mahmut B., "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, February 1993, 103.

Arab world's attitude towards Israel at the Madrid Peace conference in 1991, Turkey increased its diplomatic presence in Israel to the level of Embassy. Moreover, the signing of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles in 1993 removed all barriers to formal bilateral cooperation with Israel and the Arab-Israeli dispute ceased to be a limiting factor on Turkish-Israeli relations.

### **The Turkish-Israeli Axis**

Shortly after the famous "handshake" on the White House lawn, Turkish-Israeli cooperation increased at a very rapid pace. Turkish Foreign Minister Cetin made the first-ever official ministerial visit to Israel followed quickly by a visit of Prime Minister Ciller. During her visit, Ciller went as far as to compare Israel's founding father Ben Gurion with the much revered Turkish founding father Ataturk.<sup>57</sup> Since then there have been numerous reciprocal senior-level visits and in 1998 alone, there were more than 30 visits of high-level military and civilian officials.<sup>58</sup> In almost all fields relations have expanded as the earlier discussion revealed.

Outside of the official agreements, there has been a growth in the genuine affection between these two countries. Recently, when the American Embassy in Ankara held its usually well-attended 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, a majority of Turkey's top-ranking generals passed on the American invitation and elected instead to attend the farewell ceremony for the departing Israeli Defense Attaché Colonel Yossi Bar. To the U.S. military officers working in Ankara, this was quite a snub and revealed the growing importance of Israel.<sup>59</sup>

When the catastrophic earthquake crippled Turkey on 17 August 1999, the international community and particularly Israel was very quick to respond. The Israeli rescue teams received much media attention as they successfully rescued many Turks who were trapped under crumbled

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<sup>57</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Israeli-Turkish Relations, A Turkish 'Periphery Strategy'?" in Henri J. Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 150.

<sup>58</sup> Sedat Ergin, Ankara Bureau Chief, *Hurriyet* daily newspaper, interview by author, notes, Ankara, Turkey, 27 July 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Colonel Michael Carlin, US Air Force, Defense Attaché – Ankara, interview by author, notes, Ankara, Turkey, 26 July 1999.

buildings. One of the last survivors to be rescued before operations were ceased was a three-year-old child. There on the front page of many Turkish newspapers was an Israeli soldier holding the recently rescued child. Before departing Turkey, one such team visited one of Istanbul's many café districts. Word soon spread among the local crowd that the team was from Israel and they broke out in spontaneous applause moving the team to tears.

The mutual sympathies between the people of Turkey and Israel appear to be strengthening and have the potential to grow stronger in the future. These sympathies, as the beginning of this chapter revealed, are grounded in history. Acts such as Israel's efforts during the 1999 earthquake will surely foster this affinity.

During his reign, former Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion has been quoted as saying "*Turkey treats us as one treats a mistress, and not as a partner in an openly avowed marriage.*"<sup>60</sup> Perhaps with this in mind, Israeli President Weizman, while delivering a speech during the July 1999 visit of Turkish President Demirel, turned and asked, "*President Demirel, with your permission, could this [Turkish-Israeli relations] be called a 'love affair'?*"<sup>61</sup> Demirel could not refuse. At last, this clandestine relationship is no longer secret and, while maybe not yet an "openly avowed marriage," this "love affair" has grown very strong. Time will tell if this relationship remains just an affair or will move toward a more permanent bond.

This chapter has looked at the sometimes-troubled history of relations between Turkey and Israel. There have been some troubles but there are many reasons why this relationship can and will continue. Key among these reasons are Turkey and Israel's relationships with their respective neighbors. While this chapter focused on Turkish-Israeli relations, the next chapter will present Turkey and Israel's interaction with the region and important extra-regional parties.

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<sup>60</sup> George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Relations with Israel: From Ambivalence to Open Cooperation" in David F. Altabe, Erhan Atay, and Israel J. Katz, eds., *Studies on Turkish-Jewish History: Political and Social Relations, Literature and Linguistics. The Quincentennial Papers* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>61</sup> Sedat Ergin, "Rihtimda bir Ask Ilani," *Hurriyet* (Ankara), 16 July 1999.

## CHAPTER THREE

**Turkish and Israeli Regional and Extra-Regional Relations and Motives**

Turkey and Israel's relations with other members of the Middle East are quite complex and provide ample motive to Turkey and Israel to join with one another in cooperation to promote their mutual interests. The regional states that have been most critical of the Turkish-Israeli relationship are Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt. Yet, not all of the Arabs are opposed to growing Turkish-Israeli relations. The Palestinian Liberation Authority has never criticized the partnership and Yasser Arafat, who has enjoyed Turkish support in the past, hopes that Turkish intervention with Israel will advance the peace process. Other states, such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, appear willing to accept the Turkish-Israeli entente for they recently received visits from Turkish military vessels.<sup>1</sup> Jordan's relationship with Turkey has been growing over the years and Amman even sent an observer to the trilateral U.S.-Turkish-Israeli naval exercise Reliant Mermaid in January 1998. Additionally, Jordan has also defended Turkish and Israeli claims that their relations do not threaten the region. However, while it would be intriguing to pursue relations with all the regional members, space limitations restrict the discussion to those countries that provide Turkey and Israel primary motive to enter into an entente.

Those countries that push Turkey closer to Israel happen to be the same ones that compel Israel toward Turkey; namely Syria, Iraq and Iran. Although Egypt is a major regional player, its criticism of the entente stems not from security issues but rather from Cairo's self-perceived role as the leader of the Arab world and from its desire to set the pace of Israel's integration into the region. Syria, Iraq and Iran are the states that perceive themselves to be the most threatened and who also seem to provide Turkey and Israel their greatest security risks. Turkey has an additional

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<sup>1</sup> Makovsky, "New Activism," 103.



incentive to improve its security because of its relations with Greece, a non-Middle Eastern country but a country with whom Turkey has many disagreements and thus, must be discussed when considering Turkey's relations with Israel. Additionally, Turkey and Israel's respective relations with the preeminent external power will also be discussed, as well as the motive that these relations insert to Turkish-Israeli cooperation.

### **Turkey's Regional Relations**

In contrast to its passivity during the East-West rivalry, Turkey's post-Cold War Middle Eastern policy is characterized by accelerated activity. During the Cold War, Turkey avoided involvement in inter-Arab disputes and regional conflicts and, except for its participation in the Baghdad Pact, Turkey's official position was that of a non-activist observer regarding the Arab World. Although Turkey recognized Israel in 1949, the Turkish government gradually moved toward a more pro-Palestinian position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This evolution was partly due to domestic political pressures where Islam grew in importance in the electoral process and partly because of the need for Turkey to gain international political support at a time when relations with the West were strained because of the Cyprus issue. Furthermore, beginning with the 1973 oil crisis, economic factors persuaded Turkish officials to give more importance to its Middle Eastern policies in order to resolve its rising energy concerns. However, after the acute energy crisis subsided, Turkey again settled on a more balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Turkey's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait initiated a fundamental shift in Turkish Middle East policy as Turkey actively participated in the coalition against Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Turkish activity continued after the cessation of hostilities and Turkey played an integral role in providing relief to hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqi Kurds after the war. Additionally, Turkey was active in the Middle East peace process and made positive contributions to the negotiations. Turkish activity continued as President Turgut Ozal sought to establish Turkey as the dominant regional power in the emerging "new world order." The Turkish desire for a

position of prominence (typified by Ozal's observation "that it is better to have a seat at the table than to be on the menu") runs contrary to its neighbors' aspirations who are traditional contenders for regional leadership, namely Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Sharing borders with Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran all harbor an historical distrust of their neighbor. The borders are often disputed and irredentist claims persist. There are ethnic and kinship ties across the established borders and all four countries contain significant populations of Kurds. Therefore, proximity and cross-border ethnic and cultural ties, together with a restless minority, combine to create a situation conducive to mischief making.

Syria, Iraq and Iran are instinctively anti-Western and have been subject to Western domination and control. To these aspirant regional leaders, Turkey (not unlike Israel) represents a forward operating base from which the West tries to maintain its control over the region. For these reasons, Syria, Iraq and Iran have a fundamental suspicion of their Turkish neighbor and Turkey's recent active overtures with Israel suggest this attitude will persist.

In addition to its Middle Eastern neighbors, Turkey also has turbulent relations with Greece – a non-Middle Eastern country with many Middle Eastern ties. Together, these four countries, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Greece, constitute a severe challenge to Turkey's desire to become a regional power. It therefore would be beneficial to identify the issues that limit amicable bilateral relations between Turkey and the aforementioned countries.

There are several contentious issues between Turkey and her above-mentioned neighbors, but they are generally encompassed within three broad categories: border disputes, water rights, and support for terrorism. Before discussing Turkey's bilateral relations with each of these countries, the reader should be aware of certain conditions within Turkey, which serve to limit cordial relations.

Beginning in the 1980s, Turkey began construction on the Southeastern Anatolian Project (*Güneydogu Anadolu Projesi* or GAP) in an effort to improve the economic situation in the impoverished southeast region of the country. By investing some \$32 billion in a series of 22

dams and 19 hydroelectric power plants on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, Turkey hopes to generate 27.3 GWh of electricity each year and irrigate 1.7 million hectares of farmland.<sup>2</sup> However, the Euphrates and Tigris, which originate in Turkey, also provide the downstream riparian states, namely Syria and Iraq, essential supplies of fresh water. In order to secure an uninterrupted flow from these rivers, Syria and Iraq have pressed the Turkish government to sign a water sharing agreement. On this issue the Turks have been less than forthcoming.

Another domestic condition that affects this discussion is the 15-year Kurdish insurrection within Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers Party (*Patiya Karkeren Kurdistan* or PKK) led by Abdullah Ocalan has threatened Turkey's national unity and territorial integrity since beginning its violent activities in 1984. The PKK has tried to exploit Turkey's underdeveloped southeast region in an effort to carve out an independent Kurdish state. Although not initially supported by the bulk of the Kurdish population, the PKK has managed to attract a significant number of members especially after the scorched-earth campaign of the Turkish authorities. Contributing to the PKK's success has been external financial, military and logistical support from neighboring countries. Despite the cost of approximately \$86 billion and over 30,000 military and civilian casualties, the government has not achieved lasting success against the PKK.<sup>3</sup> In order to continue GAP, which would alleviate the economic hardships that the Turkish authorities believe to be the reason for Kurdish disaffection, the government gave priority to eradicating the PKK and restoring peace in the region. To accomplish this, the government would have not only had to defeat the PKK militarily but also sever the outside support coming to the PKK.

Having presented the background of GAP and the PKK, Turkey's respective relations with Syria, Iraq, Iran and Greece will now be discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> Olcay Unver, "Southeastern Anatolian Project," *Privateview*, Autumn 1998, vol 2, no 6, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View," in *Middle East Policy*, June 1999, 75.

### Turkish-Syrian Relations

Of all Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors, relations with Syria are the worst. Turkish-Syrian relations have never been cordial and have often been hostile. Irredentism, water and terrorism are the source of tensions and offer insight into the complexities of relations in the Middle East.

Syrian irredentist claims against Turkey originate with events that occurred during the French mandate over Syria. Following its victory in the Turkish War of Independence, Turkey successfully negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which established its internationally recognized borders. The border with Syria followed the Franklin-Bouillon agreement (1921) and thus excluded Hatay (Alexandretta), which had a mixed population of Turks and Arabs. Turkish nationalists claimed Hatay (and also Mosul) but agreed to the borders set forth in the Franklin-Bouillon agreement as long as the French maintained an autonomous regime there.<sup>4</sup> When, in 1936, France promised Syria its independence, which included Hatay, Ankara vehemently protested. An agreement was reached where Hatay (Alexandretta) would be given its independence and its Turkish inhabitants' rights would be guaranteed. However, after elections were held in 1937, France succumbed to Syrian pressure and gave the Turks only a minority representation in the government.<sup>5</sup> Turkey again protested and again the French compromised, establishing a joint Franco-Turkish protectorate with both countries' military maintaining order until an election could be held that would determine Hatay's future. The election was held on 21 July 1938 resulting in a victory of the Turks. The new state sought union with Turkey and France agreed to annexation in return for a Franco-Turkish nonaggression pact.<sup>6</sup> Turkey obliged and on 23 July 1939, the Franco-Turkish Agreement was signed and the Hatay issue was settled in Turkey's favor.

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<sup>4</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 377.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Likening this partition to the loss of Palestine, many “pan-Arabists and Greater Syria ideologues” were offended and remain so to this day.<sup>7</sup> In fact, current Syrian maps still portray Hatay as part of Syria. In addition to Hatay, there are further irredentist claims on the Turkish cities of Adana, Gaziantep, Urfa, Diyarbakir, and Mardin – lands, according to the Syrians, that are “occupied by Turks but are in reality belonging to Syria.”<sup>8</sup> Turkey refuses even to discuss the Syrian claims and is insistent on its territorial integrity.

Water tensions also create conflict between Turkey and Syria. As part of GAP, Turkey began construction on the vast network of dams during the 1980's. Syria, a downstream riparian state along the Euphrates River, feared Turkey's ability to restrict the water flow; a vital resource for Syria's well-being. Not satisfied with the amount of water in the Economic Cooperation Protocol of 1987, which committed Turkey to release no less than 500 cubic meters of water per second, Syria also grew concerned about the quality of the water that it did receive. Therefore, fearful of not only Turkey's ability to restrict the water flow but also fearful that Turkey would release polluted water, Syria, together with Iraq, pressed the Turkish government to sign a comprehensive water sharing agreement. Syria sought to bring the issue into the international debate by seeking support from the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. These organizations have called upon Turkey to be more cooperative on the water issue and to make a gesture that would alleviate the water shortage in the region.

Complicating Turkey's ability to compromise on the water issue is a tactic that Syria has adopted in order to pressure Turkish compliance – supporting PKK activities. Although Turkish intelligence officials claim that many states aid the PKK, Syrian support was claimed to be deeper and more intense. Syria has provided refuge for Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK leader, and has

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

hosted the PKK's headquarters and training camps. According to Turkish officials, besides financial and materiel support, Syria has also helped recruit and train PKK members. In its fight against the PKK, a conflict that threatens its territorial integrity and has been given top priority by the National Security Council, Turkey could not permit Syrian support to persist.

In October 1998, reminiscent of its overtures during 1957,<sup>9</sup> Turkey began massing troops along its border with Syria. Taking advantage of its new regional standing, Turkey initiated a "flexible response" strategy that would gradually escalate the crisis so long as Syria declined to respond to Turkey's demands of ending support to the PKK.<sup>10</sup> Syria's failure to do so surely would have meant war but this result was averted when Syria capitulated. Chapter Four will review this crisis in greater detail but what needs to be highlighted here is the fact that the issues of water and support for terrorism are inextricably linked and together pose obstacles for amicable Turkish-Syrian relations.

There are however, certain areas where Turkey and Syria can and do agree. The first is the concern of both countries for maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. Neither country supports the creation of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. This is particularly important for Turkey, where the PKK seeks to carve out a Kurdish state from eastern Anatolia and possibly join it with other Kurdish inhabited lands. Syria, with some 5 million Kurds of its own, also feels threatened for it does not want its Kurdish population to adopt tactics similar to those taken by the PKK. Therefore, Syria, who opposes in general the fragmentation of an *Arab* state, has no misgivings in seeking political advantage by supporting a Kurdish group seeking to dismantle the *Turkish* state, but Syrian support for a independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq is out of the question.

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<sup>9</sup> Fearing a Soviet buildup in Syria, Turkey, in collaboration with the United States massed troops on the Turkish Syrian border in August 1957. At the same time the U.S. sent its sixth fleet to the eastern Mediterranean to cruise the Syrian coast. Tensions eventually eased and nothing came of the matter.

<sup>10</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 8 October 1998

Another area of mutual concern is the containment of Saddam Hussein. Besides traditional Syrian-Iraqi tensions pertaining to Baath Party splits and geopolitical rivalries, there are also disputes over economic matters, water issues and oil pipelines.<sup>11</sup> As for the Turks, they would like to position themselves as a strategic asset for the West and to also limit Iraq's ability to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Thus, Turkey and Syria find themselves in agreement on the issues of containing Saddam Hussein, albeit for different reasons.

### Turkish-Iraqi Relations

Although topically appearing similar, Turkish relations with Iraq are quite different than those with Syria. Common points of contention (irredentism, water and terrorism) are present but these are more nuanced, especially after the Gulf War.

As mentioned earlier, Turkey allied itself with Iraq within the scope of the Baghdad Pact in the 1950s. Despite Iraq's withdrawal from the pact in 1958 but in keeping within the context of Turkey's general Middle Eastern policy, relations between the two countries were pragmatic and cooperative on most issues. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), economic relations between Turkey and Iraq strengthened, as did cooperation with regard to limiting Kurdish independence movements. Additionally, while Iraq did have concerns about reduced water flow on the Euphrates and the Tigris, most of the anger was directed towards Syria, Iraq's bitter rival.<sup>12</sup> The conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War suited Turkish interests in that the spread of Iran's Islamic revolution seemed to be contained. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and Turkey's response dramatically changed the relationship. While Turkey's adherence to post-Gulf War economic sanctions against Iraq have prevented normalization of relations, Turkey does seem eager to

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<sup>11</sup> For details on Syrian-Iraqi disputes, see Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: The Conflict Between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Phebe Marr, "Turkey and Iraq," in Henri J. Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 48.

reorient its policy towards Iraq. Turkish officials appear willing to conduct business with Saddam for they seem to believe that they know how to "handle" Saddam. Aside from the economic sanctions, there are several areas of tension between Turkey and Iraq, which will be discussed in the order of irredentism, water and terrorism.

Unlike boundary disputes between Turkey and Syria, those between Turkey and Iraq have been more or less resolved. However, a latent Turkish irredentist claim to the Mosul province and its oil remain. Only in 1926 was Iraq's northern boundary set by an international commission sponsored by the League of Nations. Although Ataturk resented this at the time, he accepted the decision, in keeping with his idea of empire relinquishment, and the issue has remained relatively unquestioned.<sup>13</sup> Despite this though, President Turgut Ozal hinted that one of the outcomes of the Gulf War could be the return of Mosul to Turkey.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the recent rise of Turkish nationalism and the inability of the international community to set a policy toward Iraq could produce an increase in Turkish irredentism. However, irredentism does not appear to be as serious a threat to Turkish-Iraqi relations as do other issues.

Iraq's dependence on Turkey for water creates friction between the two countries and could spark serious problems in the future. The causes of the water dispute have already been discussed but in many ways, Iraq's predicament is even more acute than is Syria's. Iraq is almost totally dependent on its neighbors for its water. The headwaters of the Tigris River lie outside Iraq's borders and, as already mentioned, a substantial portion of the Euphrates River passes through Syria. This places Iraq in a very weak position from which to negotiate and makes a comprehensive water-sharing agreement essential for Iraq.

Questions regarding the Kurdish issue could also significantly impact relations between Turkey and Iraq. Both governments are adamant on the containment of Kurdish separatism and that no independent Kurdistan emerges. The post-Gulf War division of Iraq has left a vacuum of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>14</sup> Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy," 92.



central authority in northern Iraq and Turkey has taken it upon itself to breach the Turkish-Iraqi border at will in order to exact punishment on suspected PKK targets. The Kurdish question is extremely complicated and is not only a strategic issue but also contains potent factors of national identity and sovereignty.<sup>15</sup> Resolution of the problem will be difficult and could either serve to divide Ankara and Baghdad or induce them to cooperate. Cooperation would be in the interest of both since there are several existing factors, which create a conducive environment for cooperation.

First, trade between Turkey and Iraq before the Gulf War was quite substantial. The double oil pipeline, running from Iraq's Kirkuk oil fields to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Dortyol, has a capacity of 1.5 million barrels per day.<sup>16</sup> When oil flow was severed because of the Gulf War, Turkey estimated its loss of revenue to be at \$1.2 billion per year. Recently, however, oil has again begun to flow as part of Iraq's "oil for food" program under UN auspices.<sup>17</sup> In 1988, Iraq was the second largest recipient of Turkish goods (after only Germany), and Turkey was the third largest recipient of Iraqi goods.<sup>18</sup> Since the Gulf War, trade between the two countries has been negligible. Therefore, upon the lifting of UN sanctions, Turkey and Iraq have an incentive to cooperate to resume this beneficial trade.

A second area of possible cooperation is in the desire to curb Islamic fundamentalism. Like Turkey, Iraq's government and much of its society are secular and can be counted on to oppose the spread of Islamic influences across the border. This, of course, can only be accomplished if Iraq maintains its territorial integrity and if the central government in Baghdad maintains control of all its provinces.

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<sup>15</sup> Marr, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Iraq, Country Profile, 1993/4* (London: EIU, 1994), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Since May 1996, UN Resolution 986 allowed limited exports of oil and imports of food and humanitarian goods. In February 1998, UN Resolution 1153 expanded this allowance to \$5.26 billion every six months.

<sup>18</sup> EIU, *Turkey, Country Profile, 1993/4* (London: EIU, 1994), 44.

Another role that Turkey desires for Iraq is as a powerful balance against Iran. For this, Iraq must remain intact and also retain a significant amount of military power. Although Saddam's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction causes alarm in Ankara, an Iraq with a credible military force provides a geostrategic balance to Iran, which is seen to be in Turkey's interest.

### Turkish-Iranian Relations

Until Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations between Ankara and Tehran were quite harmonious. Both governments shared views with respect to nation building, modernization and perceptions of threat. Both Ataturk and Reza Shah possessed a Western orientation, were secularists and were focused on internal development. Communism represented an immediate threat to both countries in the post-war period and both became members of the Baghdad Pact. Firmly entrenched in the Western camp, both Turkey and Iran were dependent on American aid and leadership. The 1979 revolution dramatically changed this, as Iran became not only an Islamic theocracy but also a decidedly anti-Western, or more correctly, an anti-American state. However, severe tensions did not immediately arise between Turkey and Iran, primarily because the Soviet Union remained a common threat and, throughout much of the 1980s, Iran was at war with Iraq. Iran depended on Turkish trade and Turkey's lines of communication with the West. After the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish-Iranian competition and distrust brought tensions to the fore. Turkish-Iranian disputes center on ideology, terrorism and competition for influence.

The dominant issue dividing Turkey and Iran is Tehran's fundamentalist Islamic worldview, which Ankara perceives as hostile to its own secular establishment and serves to create a vast ideological gulf between the two states. The rise of Turkey's own Islamic movements in recent years make some believe that these movements are linked with Iran's desire to export Islamic

revolution. Although these Turkish movements are probably the result of Turkey's internal situation and not outside interference, Turkish distrust of Iran continues.

Because of its worldview and because the United States and other governments accuse it of sponsoring international terrorism, Iran is one of the most diplomatically isolated countries in the world. Turkey too, accuses Iran of supporting terrorism and claims that Iran provides support to the PKK, which has led to several cross-border operations by the Turkish military.

Additionally, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey and Iran have been in competition for influence in Azerbaijan and the newly formed republics in Central Asia; all of which are predominantly Muslim. This competition seemed to reach a peak in 1993 and since then these countries seemed to have instead opted for leaning more toward Russia rather than either Turkey or Iran. This, however, does not seem to have lessened the competition between Turkey and Iran to bring these countries' vast energy reserves to market.

#### Turkish-Greek Relations

Turkish-Greek enmity has a rather long history and is very well documented. Despite being allies within NATO, sharing Western values and ideals and being similar in culture, Turkey and Greece have a host of bilateral problems growing primarily out of disputes over Cyprus and Aegean Sea rights. Although Turkish-Greek hostility does not contribute as greatly to Turkey's seeking an entente with Israel in the same manner as do its relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran, Turkish-Greek relations are hostile enough that Ankara must take this into account when considering its regional security problems.

Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829 and gradually began expanding its territory both in the Balkans and the Aegean. After WW I, Anatolia was divided into spheres of responsibility by the victors of that war and Greece attempted to not only occupy the Aegean region but also set out to capture all of western Anatolia up to Ankara. The Turks,

under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, thwarted Greek gains and eventually evicted the Greek armies from Anatolia. The ensuing peace treaty, the Treaty of Lausanne, established the Republic of Turkey, arrived at agreed upon borders, provided for a population exchange and, at least initially, generally quelled tensions between Turkey and Greece. This relative tranquility lasted until differences over the island of Cyprus and the continental shelf in the Aegean Sea began to impose themselves on the relationship.

Cyprus, part of the Ottoman Empire until 1878 when Britain began administering the island, fell under total British control after WW I. The island had a mixed population of both ethnic Greeks and Turks but ethnic Greeks held a majority of close to 80 percent. Many Greek Cypriots desired union with mainland Greece, or *enosis*, but contrary to their wishes, Britain awarded Cyprus its independence in 1960. The London-Zurich Agreements, which promulgated Cypriot independence, also established Britain, Turkey and Greece as guarantors of the status quo on the island. Tensions between the two Cypriot communities intensified and both mainland Greece and mainland Turkey became proponents for their respective ethnic enclaves. There have been several times when the situation reached a crisis state but when a coup sponsored by mainland Greece, overthrew the Cypriot government to enact *enosis* in 1974, Turkey responded in keeping with its role as a guarantor country by invading and occupying the northern third of the island. Unable to resolve differences, the Turkish Cypriots declared the northern portion of the island the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983. Turkey who maintains roughly 30,000 Turkish Army troops on the island is the only country to recognize the TRNC. Despite not being recognized by any other country, the TRNC does have *de facto* autonomy in the northern part of the island.

The situation in Cyprus creates many tensions between Turkey and Greece. The Republic of Cyprus (southern Cyprus) has entered into defense agreements with Greece establishing not only mutual defense but also the building of a air base on the southern part of the island. Because of Cyprus' proximity, only eighty kilometers from the Turkish mainland, Hellenic forces could

effectively range southern Anatolia. Southern Cyprus is also in the midst of an arms buildup investing \$2.6 billion in its defense systems.<sup>19</sup> This issue was highlighted recently when Southern Cyprus purchased surface-to-air missiles from Russia. The positioning of these S-300 air defense missiles would alter the current balance of power on the island where the Turks maintain air superiority. The Turkish government threatened to prevent delivery of these missiles or, if installed, threatened to destroy them. The crisis was avoided when southern Cyprus agreed not accept delivery of the missiles but the tensions on the island remain.

The second major cause of tension between Turkey and Greece involve the Aegean Sea. These disputes, involving the continental shelf, territorial waters, air space, and various islands and islets defy easy solutions. These issues directly effect the economic, political and security rights of these two littoral states. Discussion of these issues would be too voluminous and thus, cannot be given adequate space here. However, these disputes are quite serious and have erupted to near-war crisis levels in the past.

Greece, a member of the European Union, enjoys political leverage over Turkey and many hold Greece responsible for Turkey's failed membership bid. However, Turkey clearly maintains a military advantage over Greece. Turkey believes it must stand vigilant against what it considers Greek transgressions. The fact that Greece has also developed closer relations with not only Syria and Iran but also Armenia, three countries seeking to limit Turkey's regional influence, helps create an environment of distrust between the two nations.

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<sup>19</sup> "Twitchy Turks" *The Economist* (US), no. 7999 (11 January 1997): 48.

### **Turkey's Regional Motives for an Entente with Israel**

Freed from the constraints of the Cold War, Turkey is a country seeking a dominant role in the Middle Eastern subsystem. In order to achieve this position, Ankara must quell its domestic terrorism and acquire enough power to successfully resolve or adequately dissuade irredentist claims, water disputes, and conflicting interests. Moreover, Turkey must be able to wield the necessary force to deter, and if required repel, any hostile action taken against it by a potential adversary. Turkey began internal changes to increase its security but, unable to produce this capability itself, had to compensate for its deficiencies by looking externally. What Turkey specifically desired was assistance with intelligence gathering, defense modernization, and economic development that could sustain its modernization efforts. It is no coincidence that these are exactly the types of protocols that have been signed between Turkey and Israel.

#### Intelligence Sharing

The primary threat that Turkey's neighbors pose is their support for terrorism. Turkish officials believe that Syrian, Iranian and Greek support to the PKK has perpetuated the 15-year Kurdish insurrection. Another troubling issue that may be of greater importance in the future is Iraq's and Iran's desire to acquire ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Essential to defeating the PKK and preventing WMD proliferation is accurate and timely intelligence. In this field the Israelis are masters.

Israeli aid in the fight against regional terrorism and weapons proliferation is an important motivation behind Turkey's pursuit of strategic ties with Israel. Ankara could well benefit from Israeli expertise and technology. Turkey and Israel are suspected of collaborating on intelligence matters in the past and the 1994 Security and Secrecy Agreement makes official what was probably occurring anyhow. In 1982, after invading Lebanon and taking over terrorist training sites, Israel reportedly provided Turkey with information on the Armenian Liberation Army

(ASALA) whose terrorist operations were killing Turkish diplomats at a rate of about one per month.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after the invasion, ASALA's leader disappeared and the killings stopped.

Turkey and Israel have a mutual interest in preventing the proliferation of WMD and ballistic missiles. Turkey and Israel must remain vigilant, for Saddam Hussein has a proven record of employing these weapons and Iran is actively pursuing its own program. Turkey is particularly vulnerable because of its proximity and also because of a possible Iraqi desire to seek revenge for Turkey's continuing enforcement of the sanctions and its participation in Operation Northern Watch. During recent tensions this past year Turkey requested a Patriot missile battery from the United States to defend itself from a possible Iraqi retribution in the form of SCUD missiles. However, against the threat of ballistic missiles, which may or may not contain unconventional warheads, there is currently little defense. For this reason Turkey has joined with Israel to gain as much information as possible on these weapons programs and if necessary, take decisive action to destroy them as the Israelis did in 1981.<sup>21</sup>

#### Defense Modernization

For the Turkish military who had trained to fight a defensive battle to block an advancing Red Army during the Cold War, the pace and lethality of modern warfare as demonstrated in the Gulf War impressed upon the Turkish military establishment the need to modernize. The precision with which the coalition or more precisely, the American forces executed the tenets of modern warfare also demonstrated to the Turkish generals the necessity for substantially better trained personnel. Despite the Turkish Army, Navy, and Air Force being manned at the levels of 525,000, 51,000, and 63,000 respectively, Turkey's military arsenal is largely inadequate.<sup>22</sup> While the Turkish military is numerically strong, it is technologically weak. Turkey holds a

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<sup>20</sup> Leslie Susser, "Cold Turkey?" *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 September 1996, 24.

<sup>21</sup> In 1981, the Israelis conducted an air raid on the Iraqi nuclear power plant at Osirek. Israel feared the possibility that Iraq could use this facility to produce weapons grade fissile material.

quantitative advantage over all regional rivals but it also seeks a qualitative edge. Israel can help offset this imbalance for it has the reputation of either developing the best military equipment or improving upon already very capable weapon systems. Israel, unlike the U.S. and Europe, would be able to provide Turkey with state of the art military equipment without any human rights strings or any other limitations attached.

Furthermore, although no single country could probably defeat Turkey by using conventional methods, Turkey does need to be concerned about the possibility of alliances against it. In 1995 Syria and Greece reportedly signed a protocol allowing Greek military aircraft to land at Syrian airfields.<sup>23</sup> Some analysts speculate that Syria has entered into an alliance with Greece but thus far, this is unproven. Additionally, Greek, Iranian and Armenian foreign ministers have met trilaterally on an annual basis since 1995 and are reported to have established a Memorandum of Understanding in 1997 creating guidelines for economic and commercial cooperation.<sup>24</sup> Although these agreements do not appear threatening, the joining of interests among Turkey's hostile neighbors do give Turkey reasons for concern and forces Turkey to seek support from the most advanced military power of the region.

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<sup>22</sup> EIU, *Turkey, Country Profile, 1999-2000* (London: EIU, 1999), 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Milliyet*, 2 November 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Makovsky, "New Activism," 107.



### Israel's Middle Eastern Relations

Israel's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors are largely a reflection of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The origins of this conflict are well documented and this topic is beyond the scope of this study. It is, however, important to discuss Israel's relations with key members of the region. Since Israel has a peace agreement with Egypt and Jordan and for the purposes of understanding Israel's growing relations with Turkey, it is only necessary to look at Israel's relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran. These are the same countries that Turkey has antagonisms with and are the countries that, to a large degree, have prompted Israel to seek closer cooperation with Turkey.

Syria, Iraq and Iran have the ability to do physical harm to Israel and these states, at one time or another, committed themselves to the goal of eradicating the "Zionist presence."<sup>25</sup> Syria, benefiting from its contiguous border, demonstrated both its ability and desire to harm Israel during all of the Arab-Israeli Wars. Likewise, Iraq contributed a military contingent against Israel in the 1948 war, attacked Tel Aviv with SCUD missiles in 1991, and has been a vitriolic critic of Israel throughout its existence. Additionally, under Saddam Hussein, Iraq has actively sought ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Iran, since the Islamic Revolution, has been active in supporting extremist Islamic groups that rely on terrorist acts. HAMAS, Islamic Jihad and Hizbollah receive support from Iran and have carried out violent attacks against Israel.<sup>26</sup> Other Arab states (moderate Arabs who happen to be "friends" of the United States), while still denouncing Israel, have not appeared to have recently taken such direct action against Israel. Therefore, in order to understand Israel's position in the Middle East and to more fully understand Israel's motives in establishing closer ties with Turkey, it is only necessary to look at Israel's relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Sicker, *Israel's Quest for Security* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 3.

<sup>26</sup> According to the Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. State Department, available at [http://www.state.gov/global/terrorism/fto\\_info\\_1999.html](http://www.state.gov/global/terrorism/fto_info_1999.html), accessed 13 October 1999.

### Israeli-Syrian Relations

Israel's greatest concern lies with Syria. This is important because Syria is also the Middle Eastern country with whom Turkey has the most hostile relations. Like Turkish-Syrian relations, Israeli-Syrian relations involve irredentism, water and terrorism. The dominant issue is the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967 and annexed by Israel in 1981. Related to the Golan issue is the water that originates from this strategic high ground. Additionally, the Syrian tactic of aiding terrorist groups against its enemies is employed in even a more profound manner against Israel than it is against Turkey.

Despite some progress on the Golan issue in the 1990s, Israel and Syria remain at an impasse. The core issue for Syria is that Israel withdraws from all of the Golan. Israel demands a full peace with Syria including normal diplomatic and trade relations.<sup>27</sup> Because Israel, like most other Middle Eastern countries, is very arid, water is a highly prized resource, the control over which can create hostilities. Beyond the religious and political rhetoric of Israel and Syria, the need to control water sources is behind many of the policies adopted by both countries. To underscore its demands, Syria has resorted to the use of terrorism.

Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has hosted terrorists like Abu Nidal and factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization who reject peace initiatives with Israel. He provides the headquarters for HAMAS outside the occupied territories and controls the situation in Lebanon (having de facto rule) where Hizbollah is active. Assad continues to play the role of spoiler in the Middle East but this role may be changing.

Having lost the Soviet Union as its superpower patron, Syria is becoming increasingly isolated. The fact that the United States has emerged as the preeminent power in the Middle East has left Assad with little choice but to eventually accede to American pressure if he hopes to gain

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<sup>27</sup> Ian J. Binkerton and Carla L. Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 197.

economic aid from the United States. However, this would be contrary to his regional interests. This truly puts Syria at an impasse; one that Israel hopes its relations with Turkey can penetrate.

### Israeli-Iraqi Relations

Hostility is the signature feature of Israeli-Iraqi relations. From the time Iraq sent forces to invade Israel in 1948, hostility has remained. Iraq does not share a border with Israel and therefore is less of a physical threat. However, Saddam Hussein was successful in launching several SCUD missiles into Israel during the Gulf War. More than Baghdad's ideological hatred, Israel fears Saddam's ability to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them. For precisely this reason, Israel bombed the Iraqi Osireq nuclear power plant in 1981 to curb Saddam's ability to develop nuclear weapons.

Saddam Hussein is a ruthless despot who would not hesitate to eliminate Israel if he believes it to his advantage. Iraq never signed an armistice agreement with Israel in 1949, nor has it accepted any UN resolution to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. There seems to be no intention on the part of Baghdad to accept Israel's existence. While it is true that the threat that Saddam poses to Israel has lessened since the Gulf War, it is also true that the withdrawal of the UN inspection teams from Iraq and the general loss of support of the international community to continue economic sanctions on Iraq could allow for a resurgence in Saddam's lethality.

### Israeli-Iranian Relations

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Israel's relations with Iran have been hostile and antagonistic. Prior to the revolution, relations were quite the contrary. As mentioned in chapter two, Israel established a Peripheral Pact among the non-Arab states of the Middle East in 1958 in an effort to contain the perceived threats of the Arab world. However, the theocratic regime of the Mullahs holds the practices of the Shah in disdain and presents a clear danger to Israel.

The primary threat that Iran presents is its support for Islamic extremists that are fighting against Israel. HAMAS, an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, is a militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza. This group, formed at the beginning of the 1987 Intifada, is Sunni but accepts assistance from Shiite Iran.<sup>28</sup> HAMAS is opposed to the 1993 Israel-PLO accord and has conducted several acts of terrorism against Israel. Hizbollah, or the Party of God, is an umbrella group for radical Shiite factions in Lebanon and also receives support from Iran.<sup>29</sup> This group was responsible for multiple kidnappings of Westerners and continues attacks against Israel in southern Lebanon.

Tehran's fundamentalist worldview perpetuates this malevolent hatred of Israel. This undisguised hate is well documented but the following quote from Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khomeini, in February 1996 illustrates the point well: *"The government and people of Iran are of the opinion that the Israeli entity is false and artificial. In fact, there is no nation named 'Israel'";* later that same month he continued *"The power of Islam will ultimately bring about the end of the usurpatory and rootless Zionist regime, which has forced its presence upon the Palestinian land and which must be destroyed."*<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Office of counter terrorism, U.S. State Department, available at [http://www.state.gov/global/terrorism/fto\\_info\\_1999.html](http://www.state.gov/global/terrorism/fto_info_1999.html), accessed 13 October 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Information Division, Israel Foreign Ministry, "Iran and Hizbollah," Jerusalem, February 1997; available at [gopher://israel-info.gov.il:70/00/terror/970212.ter](http://gopher://israel-info.gov.il:70/00/terror/970212.ter), accessed 13 October 1999. Quoted in Brent Sasly, *A Structural Reinterpretation of Power in the Middle East*, unpublished thesis, 1998.

### Israel's Regional Motives for an Entente with Turkey

Paramount in Israeli society is the long-standing quest for security. Since its inception, Israel's neighbors have threatened its very existence. After over fifty years of living under this sort of pressure, it is logical for the people of Israel to have a pervasive concern with security. No decision, whether political or social, foreign or domestic, is undertaken by the Israelis without considering how it will effect the security of the state.<sup>31</sup>

Israel tried to solve its security dilemma by reaching out to non-Arab countries in the Peripheral Pact. After limited results, Israel then sought assistance from an external power, the United States. This relationship has proved to be more durable and beneficial but Israel has been careful not to depend solely on U.S. protection. Israel was able to develop a very high-tech defense industry and an elaborate intelligence network. However, the Middle East has changed and the threats confronting Israel have also changed. With the advances in technology, the proliferation of missiles and WMD, and the increasing sophistication in terror techniques, Israel can no longer rely on its own efforts to withstand the new challenges emerging in the Middle East. While its relationship with the U.S. is strong, it would be unrealistic to believe that Israel does not also need regional friends. To this end, Israel has entered into several agreements with Turkey to better position itself to defend against existing and future threats.

The discussion above concerning relations with Syria, Iraq, and Iran reveal the threats facing Israel. Syria is a proximate, hostile neighbor who has shown its desire to eliminate Israel and supports terrorism against Israel. Iraq, although somewhat damaged since the Gulf War, also seeks the elimination of Israel and has not only a proven WMD capability but has also shown the will to use its WMD. Iran too desires to purge the region of Israel and has embarked on a rearmament program that is unhindered in its efforts to attain advanced weapons, which include ballistic missiles and WMD. While Israel can defend its own borders, the threat of terrorism and

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Sicker, *Israel's Quest for Security*, 1.

ballistic missiles leave Israel incredibly vulnerable. Cooperation with Turkey addresses these vulnerabilities and establishes an effective counter-weight to future Syrian, Iraqi, or Iranian aggressions.

Turkey borders all three of these states and its vast land and airspace not only gives Israel an area in which to hone its combat skills but also provides Israel with a stage from which to conduct surveillance and, if necessary, carry out combat operations. With Turkey being a friend of Israel, Syria cannot make a credible offensive move toward the Golan without exposing its northern border. By using Turkish airspace for routes of ingress and as an in-flight refuel point, Israel would have unhindered access to the territory of both Iraq and Iran. This is of considerable value to Israel if it decides to conduct another preemptive strike against suspected weapons facilities as it did at Osireq. This newly acquired capability for such actions has the most value against Iran, since it is the country the farthest distance. When former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Itamar Rabinovitch was asked about the motive of Israel in establishing military relations with Turkey, he responded, "*If anything, the Turkish-Israeli pact is directed against Iran!*"<sup>32</sup>

Because Israel and Turkey also share intelligence, Israel has access to the signal intelligence acquired from the many listening posts along Turkey's southern and eastern borders. Israeli expertise and advanced technology combined with Turkish collection assets makes this quite a sophisticated intelligence network. Israel and Turkey now have the capability to monitor the activities of various terrorist groups and keep tabs on any troop movements or changes in military posturing.

Another reason behind Israel's growing closeness with Turkey is to have a ready customer for Israeli military equipment. Only five years ago Israel's defense industry was in serious financial trouble.<sup>33</sup> The demise of this industry would seriously limit Israeli weapons production, reduce

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<sup>32</sup> Question asked by author during the Question and Answer period of a lecture given by Rabinovitch on 25 February 1999 at Princeton University.

<sup>33</sup> Steve Rodan, "Israel's Defense Industry: Preparing for the Merger Plunge," in *Military Technology* vol. 23 no. 6, 1999, 52.

its capacity for research and development and heighten its security dilemma. Israel successfully reorganized its defense industry and concentrated on weapons exports to maintain its solvency. Now, exports account for some 60%-70% of the total cumulative turnover of Israeli defense industries<sup>34</sup> and Turkish contracts play a large part in these exports.

Outside of Israel's security concerns, relations with Turkey also end its political isolation in the region. Although Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and has diplomatic relations with Arab countries, these relations are not "normal" as one thinks of diplomatic relations. Only with Turkey, and to a lesser degree Jordan, does Israel have comprehensive economic and cultural relations. In a region strife with animosities, Israel could well use all the friends it can find.

### **Turkish and Israeli Extra-Regional Relations**

Since there has been a fundamental change in the international system resulting in a unipolar world, it would be beneficial to discuss Turkish and Israeli relations with the remaining superpower. The United States is the unchallenged, preeminent external power in the Middle East. For the U.S., the Middle East has strategic importance and contains vast energy reserves. It is in the United States interest to have stability in the region; a situation to which the U.S. has committed vast amounts of resources to bring about. Although Washington was not involved in the development of closer Turkish-Israeli relations, it nonetheless benefits from the arrangement. U.S. support for Turkish-Israeli relations is desirous but by no means essential. Turkish-Israeli cooperation would continue without American support but such support would favor more intense cooperation. Moreover, U.S. efforts to hinder relations would be quite detrimental. It therefore is essential to look at relations among these parties.

The European Union is also important in Turkish decision-making. The historic 1997 summit in Luxembourg announced the next set of candidates for full membership and Turkey did not

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<sup>34</sup> Ilan Biran, "Defense Export as a Central Objective," in *Military Technology* vol. 23 no. 6 1999, 56.

make the list. Ankara perhaps foresaw this negative result and therefore established closer relations with Israel to offset Turkish losses. However, more than half of Turkey's trade is with the EU and Ankara still adheres to the customs union agreement reached in 1995. Moreover, the recent thaw in Turkey's relations with the EU following the devastating 17 August 1999 earthquake in Turkey opens the possibility of Turkish inclusion on the list of candidates for EU membership. The EU may have been a factor in Turkey's decision to establish better relations with Israel but not to the same degree as its U.S. relations. Therefore, the following discussion is directed toward Turkey and Israel's relations with the preeminent extra-regional power, the United States.

### Turkish-American Relations

To a large degree, Turkish-U.S. relations have already been discussed in Chapter Two. As one can gather from that discussion, Turkish-U.S. relations seem one-sided and are rather complex. Nevertheless, Washington remains Turkey's primary, and sometimes only, supporter in the international arena. The United States has backed Turkey's bid to host Caspian Sea energy pipelines and Turkey's efforts to gain membership into the European Union. Washington agrees with Turkey that the PKK is a terrorist organization and supports Turkey's right to send its military into northern Iraq to fight the PKK. The U.S. even supplied Turkey with intelligence as to the whereabouts of Turkey's number one enemy, Abdullah Ocalan, which led directly to his capture. Turkey in turn, by allowing the United States to stage Operation Northern Watch on its territory, provides the basis for what passes as U.S. policy on Iraq.

However, Washington's influence has fallen somewhat in Ankara. This is primarily due to decreasing levels of U.S. security and economic assistance, which has ended completely. To many Turkish policymakers, this sends a message that Washington is downgrading the importance of Turkish relations.<sup>35</sup> Another reason for the decline in U.S. influence is the

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<sup>35</sup> Makovsky, "New Activism," 106.



politicization of arms sales. The influence of special interest groups on the U.S. Congress was mentioned in Chapter Two but recently this influence has also extended to the executive branch. As Alan Makovsky writes, "In ending foreign aid and withholding arms, Washington forsakes its means of influencing Turkey."<sup>36</sup>

### Israeli-American Relations

For many years, Israel and the United States have had a very "special" relationship. Beginning in the 1960s, Israeli and American interests seemed to have completely merged and the U.S. has even proclaimed that the survival of Israel is the American national interest. During the Cold War, Israel served as a bulwark against Soviet aggression. After the end of the Cold War, Israel remains a strategic asset for the United States but not in the same sense.

Israel has served many U.S. interests in the post-Cold War era by keeping Syria in check, cooperating in defense technology, assisting the U.S. in intelligence gathering, and by being a promoter of pro-Western and democratic values in a region where religious fundamentalism is on the rise. To underscore its commitment, Washington continues its multi-billion dollar aid to Israel and ensures that Israel maintains a qualitative edge over the Arabs in weapons technology. However, some elements in the United States are beginning to question the strategic value of Israel in the post-Cold War environment.

During the Gulf War, Washington had gone to great lengths to develop and nurture relations with moderate Arab states. It can be argued that the Oslo accords and the current Middle East peace process were borne out of these efforts. Now, with the peace process facing serious obstacles, Washington is in a delicate position of pushing the continuance of the process without offending either Israeli or Arab sensibilities. The course that the peace process takes could well determine the future of Israeli-U.S. relations. While it is practically unthinkable that U.S. support for Israel would end, Washington does have more room in which to maneuver in order to bring

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

about a desired peace. Without the constraints of the Cold War and a growing resolve in Washington for a fair peace settlement, the United States could apply more pressure on Israel to be more forthcoming.

### **Turkey's Extra-Regional Motives**

Some U.S. diplomats believe that Turkey has become closer to Israel in order to get closer to America.<sup>37</sup> In other words, for Turkey, relations with Israel are the tactical maneuvers to attain the strategic objective, which is the United States. While better relations with the U.S. is a motive, it does not surpass Turkey's regional motives in importance. However, there are several areas where improved Turkish-Israeli cooperation could benefit Turkey in Washington.

The United States generally supports Turkey in the international arena as mentioned above. However, Washington's unreliability in delivering weapons sought by Turkey and Washington's imposition of criteria that limit the use of the weapons it does deliver places Turkey in a difficult position to fulfill its need to modernize its defense. To a large extent, weapons attained from Israel can offset America's declining support in this area but not totally. Furthermore, much of the weapons and munitions being produced by Israel contain U.S.-origin technology and components. In order for Israel to sell/transfer such weapons and munitions, the United States must consent to their release. The organization responsible for providing or denying this consent is the Department of State but Congress does have a significant amount of influence on third country transfers. Because of congressional influence, arms transfers to Turkey may be problematic. For, as mentioned earlier, Turkey has received congressional criticism for its human rights record and its turbulent relations with Greece.

Compounding Turkey's problems is the incredible amount of influence that Washington is able to wield to shape the debate on issues of critical importance to Turkey; namely Cyprus, the

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<sup>37</sup> Political-Military Officers, American Embassy-Ankara and U.S. Department of State Headquarters, interview by author, notes, Ankara, Turkey and Washington DC, USA, various dates in 1999.

PKK, and economic matters. Congress, more so than the executive branch, has been extremely susceptible to pressures from pro-Greek and pro-Armenian ethnic lobbies and human rights groups. To counter these influences, Turkey hopes that powerful pro-Israeli lobbies will take up its cause in Washington.

There is evidence that these groups have sided with Turkey and are willing on occasion to promote its interests. On 17 December 1998, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a prominent Jewish organization, presented Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz its Distinguished Statesman Award with the ADL director stating that "*Turkey stands as a country committed to democracy and the promotion of tolerance.*"<sup>38</sup> Another signal of changing relationships in Washington occurred when 81 Senators signed a letter in April 1998 calling on the Clinton administration to stop "using public pressure against Israel." Conspicuously absent among the signatories was Greek-American and long-time supporter of Israel, Maryland Senator Paul Sarbanes.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the most forthright statement came from Israeli Defense Minister Yitzak Mordechai when he said that "*Israel is assisting Turkey on the American political scene and is encouraging Jewish organizations to follow this example.*"<sup>40</sup>

However, these lobbies can be of only so much value to Turkey for they have only limited political capital to divert away from their primary mission of promoting Israeli interests. Where Israeli and Turkish interests intersect, then these lobbies will act on Turkey's behalf. On issues where Israel has no interest, then Turkey is on its own. One individual who has arrived at this sobering conclusion was the current Turkish Ambassador to the United States Baki Ilkin, for,

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<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Washburn, "Power Bloc: Israel and Turkey are Allies," *The Progressive*, December 1998; available from Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe; p. 1 of 9.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Pipes, "The Real New Middle East," *American Jewish Committee Commentary*, November 1998; available from Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Washburn, 6.

during a recent conversation, he stated, *"Support from these Israeli lobbies has been less than expected."*<sup>41</sup>

Another motive for developing stronger relations with Israel is to penetrate the large American market, particularly in the field of textiles. Israel and the United States share a free trade agreement.<sup>42</sup> Turkey has no such agreement and has limits on the amount and type of goods it can bring to the United States.<sup>43</sup> In order to break into the American market, Turkish firms could perhaps establish Turkish-front companies in Israel and sell nominally Israeli-made products to the American consumers. Making this possibility easier is the fact that Turkey was recently added as a port-call to the cargo maritime line that originally ran only between Israel and the United States. In July 1999, Presidents Weizman and Demirel presided over the official opening of this container traffic route at the Israeli port city of Ashdod.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Turkey not only benefits from the 1996 Turkish-Israeli Free Trade Agreement with direct trade with Israel but could also gain additional access into the lucrative American market.

### **Israel's Extra-Regional Motives**

For Israel too, America provides motive for closer relations with Turkey. Israel can no longer present itself as a strategic asset to the United States in a combined fight against the spread of communism. America's relations with moderate Arab states have steadily improved and the faltering peace process could mark a beginning of diminishing American support. The United States surely would not abandon Israel but it could put a significant amount of pressure to force Israel into making peace with the Arabs and relinquish all the occupied territories. Any territory

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<sup>41</sup> Discussion with author at a conference of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations, Philadelphia, PA, 22 May 1999.

<sup>42</sup> On 4 November 1996, the United States and Israel signed a Free Trade Agreement, available at [www.mac.doc.gov/tcc/treaty.htm](http://www.mac.doc.gov/tcc/treaty.htm), accessed 13 October 1999.

<sup>43</sup> For a list of restrictions regarding Turkish trade to the United States, go to Turkish agreements at [www.mac.doc.gov/tcc/treaty.htm](http://www.mac.doc.gov/tcc/treaty.htm).

<sup>44</sup> Sedat Ergin, "Ashdod Rihtiminda Turkiye'ye Ilani Ask," in *Hurriyet* 16 July 1999.

that Israel forfeits within the auspices of the peace process significantly decreases the defensibility of Israel's borders. If it returns to its pre-1967 borders, Israel would lose the strategic high ground of the Golan and the rather easily defended banks of the Jordan River. These borders would be closer to centers of population and industry and greatly reduce Israel's standoff range. To help offset such vulnerabilities that are inherent in any "land-for-peace" option, which the United States might pressure Israel into accepting, Israel has sought a military relationship with Turkey.

If Turkish-Israeli relations evolve to the point of a full-fledged alliance, either officially or unofficially, forfeiting the occupied territories would be more tolerable for the Israelis. Turkey, by presenting the possibility of a flank attack, would effectively neutralize any aggression originating from Damascus, Baghdad, or Tehran. Alas, there is no such known arrangement but diminishing American support or the forfeiture of land *could* induce Israel to seek even closer relations with Turkey.

This chapter, while admittedly brief, has attempted to present the complex relationships that Turkey and Israel share with regional states and the threats these states pose. This chapter also described the motives these threats inject for closer Turkish-Israeli cooperation. Additionally, relations with the United States was also discussed as well as the motives the U.S. provides to Turkey and Israel to join together in an attempt to improve their security and prosperity. The next chapter looks at the strength of the Turkish-Israeli entente and the future of these relations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **The Future of Turkish-Israeli Relations**

This chapter will focus on the future direction of the entente between Turkey and Israel. The previous chapters revealed that Turkish and Israeli relations extend back for a rather long time but have only recently flourished. During the past decade almost every facet of cooperation has advanced. There are several reasons for this but the primary motive seems to have been the change in the international system and Turkey and Israel's regional concerns. Turkey has entered into the entente because of opportunities; Israel because of threats. Israel provides Turkey the opportunity to modernize and expand its markets. Turkey helps Israel counterbalance the threats facing the Jewish State. Cooperation between Turkey and Israel will not go unchallenged for there are several potential obstacles that could hinder relations. Despite these challenges however, Turkish-Israeli relations will continue to expand and become the dominant force in the region. To understand the benefits offered by the relationship, one only has to look at the events of last year.

#### **Realities of Turkish-Israeli Cooperation: The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998**

The Turkish-Syrian crisis reveals the opportunity that relations with Israel provide. Turkey has long accused Damascus of providing support to the PKK. For Syria, the PKK "card" enabled it to put pressure on Turkey to be more forthcoming about the waters on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Syria not only provided the PKK with financial and logistical support but also gave refuge to the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan.

On 23 January 1996, Turkey delivered a memorandum charging Syria of *de facto* aggression against Turkey by supporting the PKK and that under Article 51 of the UN Charter, Turkey was

entitled to adopt self-defense measures against Syria.<sup>1</sup> In the same memorandum, Turkey stressed that normal relations could not be conducted until Syria ceased support for the PKK and, for the first time, demanded that Syria hand-over Ocalan and his collaborators to Turkish authorities.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Turkey demanded that Syria should not: 1) permit camps for terrorist training to operate in territories under its control; 2) provide weapons or logistic materials to the PKK; 3) provide fraud identification documents to PKK members; 4) help terrorists in obtaining legal passage and infiltration into Turkey; 5) permit propaganda activities of the terrorist organization; 6) allow the PKK to operate in accommodations in its territory; and 7) facilitate the passages of terrorists from third countries (Europe, Greece, Southern Cyprus, Iran, Libya, Armenia) to northern Iraq and Turkey. Additionally, Turkey demanded that Syria should provide: 1) cooperation in all activities aimed at fighting terrorism; and 2) abstention from inciting other countries which are members of the Arab League against Turkey. Beginning in 1998, Turkey actively used diplomacy to get Syrian concessions by sending Ambassador Aykut Cetirge to Damascus in February.<sup>3</sup> Syria reciprocated in July by sending its Deputy Foreign Minister to Ankara in July of the same year.<sup>4</sup> These discussions however, failed to resolve the disputes between the two countries.

Beginning in September 1998, high-ranking Turkish military and civilian officials began issuing statements to the effect that Turkey was running out of patience with Syria. The situation developed into a crisis when Turkey began massing forces on the Turkish-Syrian border. Syria retaliated by sending some of its own troops toward the border along with several SCUD missiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Cumhuriyet, 7 June 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Turkey's Specific Demands from Syria, Annex 2, Turkish-Syrian Agreement, signed 20 October 1998.

<sup>3</sup> ArabicNews.com, "Turkey, Syria to Continue Dialogue" available at <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980228/1998022814.html>. The Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al Sharaa also met at the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Doha, March 1998.

<sup>4</sup> ArabicNews.com, "Damascus, Ankara Fail to Settle Disputes" available at <http://arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980704/1998070433.html>.

The situation escalated to the point where Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Huseyin Kivrikoglu announced that Turkey was in a state of undeclared war with Syria.

Seeking to mediate the crisis, Egyptian President Husni Mubarak shuttled between Ankara and Damascus. The Arab League, hoping to isolate Turkey, issued a statement denouncing the Turkish threats, declared solidarity with Syria and supported the mediation efforts of Mubarak.<sup>5</sup> The Arabs probably concluded that the only possible victor of a conflict between Turkey and Syria would be Israel and therefore, tried to avoid a war.

Despite reluctant acceptance of mediation efforts by Mubarak, Turkey benefited from his endeavors. Apparently, Mubarak was successful in convincing the Syrian's that Turkey was not bluffing and that both Syria and the Arab world would be the losers in the struggle against Israel should Turkey take military actions against Syria.<sup>6</sup> Amid reported internal disagreements, Syria agreed to Turkish terms and on 20 October 1998 in Adana, signed an agreement with Turkey.

Although the Turks gained an almost complete victory, they failed on one of their demands – the handing over of Abdullah Ocalan. Syria evicted the PKK leader prior to the agreement and therefore could not turn him over to the Turkish authorities. After a desperate search for asylum in Russia and throughout Europe, Ocalan was eventually captured by Turkish security agents in Kenya.

Despite this shortcoming, Syria capitulated on all of the other Turkish demands. By the terms of the agreement, Syria for the first time acknowledged that the PKK was a terrorist organization. They agreed to end their support of the PKK, arrest PKK militants active in Syria, and evacuate the PKK camps there. Additionally, Syria agreed to extend cooperation with Turkey against the PKK well into the future.

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<sup>5</sup> Milliyet, 11 October 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View," in *Middle East Policy* June 1999, 178.



### Timing and Gunboat Diplomacy

Why had Turkey chosen October 1998 to act against Syria and why did it feel it could coerce Syria to meet its demands? The October Crisis was the conjoining of three phenomenon. The first is Ankara's and the Turkish public's growing frustration with the war against the PKK and Syria's support for the terrorist organization. Turkey's war with the PKK was entering its fifteenth year and fatigue was at a high level. Turkish officials consistently saw the PKK conflict, not as an internal issue, but rather, as an externally generated problem; a scheme used by its enemies to weaken the Turkish state. Moreover, Turkey viewed Syrian support for the PKK as the critical element enabling the PKK to wage war against Turkey on all its Middle Eastern borders.<sup>7</sup> Until the October agreement, Syria had always denied that it supported the PKK or hosted Abdullah Ocalan. However, the highly publicized confessions of the captured high-ranking PKK official Sirri Sakik revealed, openly, the link between Syria and the PKK.<sup>8</sup> These revelations created a significant anti-Syrian attitude among the Turkish populace who strongly favored the strong-armed tactics of Turkish diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, an agreement on 17 September 1998 that the United States reached with Iraqi Kurdish leaders Mahmoud Barzani and Jamal Talabani may have influenced Turkey's decision to pressure Syria in October.<sup>10</sup> This agreement sought cooperation of these two rivals in working toward a federated state in Iraq. Turkey feared this cooperation as a first step in the establishment of an independent Kurdistan that could allow the PKK more freedom in northern Iraq and thus, easier access into Turkey. In any event, an autonomous province, governed by a united Kurdish government that has the support of the United States would bring into question Turkey's ability to protect its interests in

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Makovsky and Michael Eisenstadt, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Crisis Delayed?" in *Policywatch* no. 345, 14 October 1998, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 4 October 1998.

<sup>9</sup> *Hurriyet*, 15 October 1998.

<sup>10</sup> *Aykan*, 179.

northern Iraq. Therefore, "*forcing Syria to cease support to the PKK became a perceived necessity*" to neutralize the militants in Syria before they became more active in northern Iraq within the relative freedom that Washington wanted to achieve.<sup>11</sup> Another consideration, which falls under Turkey's increasing frustration was the growing European recognition of the PKK and the Kurdish cause. Recent efforts by the PKK to promote itself as a national liberation movement had prompted many in Europe to mount an international effort to seek a political settlement to Turkey's Kurdish problem. For the Turks, this would be unacceptable as it brought into question Turkey's sovereignty and recalled memories of the Treaty of Sevres, which had established a plan for the partition of Anatolia following WW I. Thus, within the mindset of Ankara, it became urgent to eradicate the PKK and once this was accomplished, the Kurdish question would go away.

The second factor influencing Turkey to take action against Syria was the increased confidence of the armed forces. The Turkish military had been very successful in synchronizing its forces during its battles with the PKK. While the PKK could offer only limited resistance, the Turkish military had gained valuable combat experience and had become secure in their ability to conduct a combined arms fight. Syria, who last saw combat in 1982 when its air force suffered devastating losses at the hands of the Israelis, had failed to maintain its military arsenal because of the lost patronage of the Soviet Union. Reinforcing this sense of Turkish military superiority was Turkey's relationship with Israel. Despite Israel's claim that it played no active role in the crisis, Israel did contribute to Turkey's success by preoccupying the majority of Syrian forces at Golan, therefore making it difficult for Asad to redeploy any significant number of forces to the Turkish border. Additionally, closer Turkish-Israeli relations must have left Asad wondering whether or not Turkey was conspiring with Israel to coordinate a military offensive against Syria.

A third reason that played into Turkey's timing of the crisis is the almost total isolation of Syria. The collapse of the Soviet Union and lack of hard currency distanced Syria from Moscow and Syria's continued support for terrorism and obstruction in the Middle East peace process

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

separated it from Washington. On the whole, Arabs did offer rhetorical support but failed to define the Turkish-Syrian crisis as a larger Turkish-Arab crisis.<sup>12</sup> In fact, then-Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan stated that the crisis could only be resolved when Syria put an end to PKK activities on Syrian soil.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Alan Makovsky and Michael Eisenstadt believe that the American declaration of "no safe havens for terrorists" following the bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan on 20 August 1998 made the moment propitious for Turkey to apply the same logic to Syria.<sup>14</sup> Without any friends willing to come to the rescue of Syria, Turkey concluded that the time was ripe to remove Syria from the PKK equation.

#### Implications of the Turkish-Syrian Crisis

What is important in this case is the almost total victory of the Turks. A combination of timing and circumstances inspired Turkey to seek a confrontation with Syria. Turkey tried normal diplomacy to resolve its complaints with Syria but in the end successfully employed coercion. Despite its previous claims that Syria supported the PKK, Turkey only acted when several factors combined to make the time opportune. The absence of any of the above-mentioned factors would probably have caused the Turks to reconsider. To claim that Turkey acted only because of its growing cooperation with Israel would be inappropriate, but these relations were a significant factor in Turkey's decision. The ability to keep the majority of the Syrian forces oriented south so that they could not redeploy to meet the Turkish challenge in the north combined with the ability to confound Asad as to the degree of Turkish-Israeli cooperation greatly benefited Turkey.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Makovsky, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Crisis Delayed?," 2.

Relations with Israel do not only provide Turkey with material benefits but also increases Turkey's confidence. Turkey no longer has to look to the south in fear. In spite of the almost total isolation that the Arabs have bestowed upon it, Turkey now has a partner in the region that allows Turkey to act decisively to protect its interests.

However, the Israeli response to the crisis seemed to have perplexed the Turks. Israel vehemently denied any involvement in the crisis and even delayed a series of military training exercises along the Syrian border to alleviate any suspicions to the contrary. Ankara probably was looking for more concrete contributions from Israel but the reality of the situation is that overt actions were not necessary. A war between Turkey and Syria was averted and the value of relations with Israel was confirmed. For the true value of relations with Israel is not to fight a war as allies but rather to convince any potential adversary that it would be disadvantageous to enter into a conflict with either Turkey or Israel. It is for this reason that the October Crisis demonstrated the reality of the Turkish-Israeli entente.

### **Potential Obstacles to Turkish-Israeli Cooperation**

Israel's quick disavowal of complicity in the October Crisis demonstrate well the complications that close Turkish-Israeli cooperation can inspire. Likewise, the aftermath of Ocalan's capture in Kenya was a public relations nightmare for Israel, resulting in the death of three Kurdish men at the Israeli mission in Germany. As in any tense situation that is concealed behind a shroud of secrecy, the tendency to conjecture creates a perception that may be far removed from reality. Aside from the speculation, sensationalism and conspiracy theories, the Turkish-Israeli entente is an unconcealed relationship that faces several legitimate obstacles. However, none of these, either individually or collectively, seem able to prevent the relationship from continuing.

### Impediments to Military Cooperation

Currently, both Turkey and Israel are very content with the level of military cooperation. However, there are three areas that may limit improved relations. The first area, limitations on the transfer of U.S.-origin technology to a third party, was briefly discussed previously and presents a potentially serious obstacle. In Chapter Three, this issue was discussed in terms of how special interest pressures within Congress could influence arms transfers to Turkey. However, outside of these political considerations, the United States may have legitimate national security issues involved in denying the transfer of these types of technologies. Transfers of arms containing U.S.-origin technology from second parties to third parties must comply with the same guidelines as arms transfers from the United States to that third party. These guidelines are contained in the United States Conventional Arms Transfer Policy, which states as goals to 1) promote regional stability in areas critical to U.S. interests; 2) promote peaceful conflict resolution and arms control, human rights, democratization, and other U.S. foreign policy objectives; and 3) enhance the ability of the U.S. defense industrial base to meet U.S. defense requirements and maintain long-term military technological superiority at lower costs. The United States and Israel's defense industries cooperate closely and share very sensitive technologies. The United States could hinder any attempt by Israel to transfer these technologies to a party that, in the opinion of the United States, would violate stated U.S. goals. For example, the U.S. may not look favorably on transfers to a Turkish government that is violating basic human rights or is taking an antagonistic stand toward its neighbors, actions that arguably could destabilize the region. However, determining the origin of these technologies could prove very difficult and would involve many legal interpretations. An example of the complexity of such transfers is the POPEYE missiles from Israel to Turkey. Currently the U.S. claims that the POPEYE missile contains U.S. components. Israel disagrees and without requesting transfer

permission from Washington, Israel has stated that they will sell these arms to Turkey.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, if Turkey were in the market for weapons, American defense contractors would invariably attempt to fulfill the Turkish contract at the expense of Israeli firms and petition Congress to approve the sale in order to maintain the industry's solvency, which is in the national interest and is in keeping with goal #3 of the Arms Transfer Policy. Interestingly, after the completion of its current contract, General Dynamics will be forced to close down its production line of M1 Abrams main battle tanks if it does not secure another contract.<sup>16</sup> The most lucrative prospect in the market is the Turkish contract for a main battle tank. Rather than compete with General Dynamics, Israel unexpectedly removed its bid to supply its Merkava main battle tank to Turkey and instead, joined forces with General Dynamics to fulfill the Turkish contract. The competition in the arms market is quite severe and Israel's ability to gain Washington's approval of weapons transfers figures high in future Turkish-Israeli military cooperation.

A second impediment to military relations is the possibility that Israel will try to curb the amount of technology leaving its border. Turkey desires weapon systems with high technology. However, they do not wish merely to purchase the weapons, they desire to joint-produce them within Turkey. In this manner, they not only receive state of the art weapons but also gain the ability to produce weapons beyond its needs and perhaps enter the lucrative arms market. Additionally, the technology gained could arguably be transferred to other systems and to other sectors of the market. It would not be in Israel's interest to suffer a massive technology drain since Israel's security depends on a qualitative advantage in its military arsenal. Therefore, Israel may hesitate to satisfy Turkish demands to co-produce weapons and may limit the export of its most advanced systems.

The third area of possible obstacles in the military realm is the lack of reciprocity in weapons sales. Currently, Turkey is content with having access to Israel's advanced weapons systems,

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<sup>15</sup> Office of Regional Security and Arms Transfer Policy, U.S. State Department.

<sup>16</sup> Political-Military Official, U.S. Embassy-Ankara.

however, in accordance with the 1996 Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement, Turkey also expects Israel to reciprocate by purchasing Turkish-made military equipment. Unfortunately for Turkey, the quality of its products is inferior to Israeli products and to products that Israel could purchase elsewhere. While Israel has made some token purchases of Turkish military equipment, there is currently a vast imbalance in military trade.<sup>17</sup>

These three factors, limitations on the transfer of US-origin technology to a third party, Israel's reluctance to suffer a technology drain and the lack of reciprocity in military trade could significantly alter current military relations between Turkey and Israel. These are not the only factors that could limit closer Turkish-Israeli relations, for if Israel settles its disputes with Syria, a significant factor would be removed from Israel's regional motives for relations with Turkey.

#### Israeli-Syrian Peace

A "reformed" Syria may lessen the need for intense military cooperation between Turkey and Israel. There are indications that Israel and Syria may be close to resuming negotiations to establish peace between them. Syria, the most hostile neighbor of both Israel and Turkey, may be maneuvering to end its role as a spoiler and work toward regional cooperation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Moscow's patronage of Damascus, Syria is no longer the same threat to Israel as it was previously. There is growing optimism in the region and in the West that an Israeli-Syrian peace can become a reality and Israel is under increasing pressure to arrive at a peace settlement with Syria. Furthermore, Western aid for reconciliation with Israel would help stabilize and improve the Syrian economy. A revitalized economy would enable Damascus to assume a more dominant role in regional affairs and given Syria's control over Lebanon, an Israeli-Syrian peace would also bring relative stability to Israel's northern border.

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<sup>17</sup> Metehan Demir, interview with author, 27 July 1999.

Israel also has incentives to remove the constant tensions with Syria. Peace with Syria and stability in Lebanon would, for the first time since its inception, provide Israel peace on all its borders. Once achieved, Israel could then concentrate its resources on integrating itself into the region, a task that has thus far alluded Israel. As Barry Rubin states, "*only Syrian peace with Israel would make possible a full resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.*"<sup>18</sup> Peace on its border would also allow Israel to divert the security resources from its borders and concentrate on the threats posed by Iraq and Iran. Additionally, the Israeli people themselves may be growing weary of living under the constant threat war. Israeli society seems to have turned away from aggression and has increasingly questioned military actions since the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and especially after the government's response to the 1987 *intifada*. This is reflected in the election of Prime Minister Barak, which provides much optimism of securing peace in the region.

If an Israeli-Syrian peace does materialize, the need for stronger military relations with Turkey may decrease. While military sales and training would remain important, more intensive cooperation might be unnecessary. For Turkey too, the need to encircle Syria may lessen if peace is acquired. Having received a Syrian promise of noninterference with the PKK after the October Crisis, Turkey may view compromises with Israel as a signal of further Syrian rehabilitation. A more cooperative Syria would lessen the immediate threats facing both countries and remove the impetus for extensive military arrangements.

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<sup>18</sup> Barry Rubin, "The New Middle East: Opportunities and Risks," *Security and Policy Studies No. 19* (Israel: The BESA Center for Strategic Studies, February 1995), 57.



### Domestic Turkish Islamic Movements

Political Islam in Turkey has been gaining strength throughout this decade. In 1994, the mainstream pro-Islamic party, *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party), won municipal elections in the major cities of Ankara and Istanbul. In the 1995 national elections, Welfare gained a plurality of the votes with 21.3 percent. After failed attempts by Turkey's secular parties, Welfare came to power in a coalition government and on 28 June 1996, Welfare's leader, Necmettin Erbakan became the first pro-Islamic prime minister.

Erbakan came to power with ambitions of reorienting Turkey's outlook eastward and toward Islamic countries. Signaling this intent, Erbakan's first trips abroad were to anti-Western (and anti-Zionist) states of Iran and Libya. Additionally, Erbakan was very critical of Turkey's relations with Israel.

Erbakan's actions raised the ire of Turkey's secular establishment and in February 1997, the Turkish military, the self-appointed protectors of Kemalism, using its privileges within the National Security Council, issued an 18-point plan aimed at curbing Islamic political and social influences. In April, the military issued its new National Military Strategy, which proclaimed Islamic radicalism, along with Kurdish separatism, as the leading security threats against the Turkish state. By taking legal steps to ban Welfare and by publicly criticizing the government, the military was successful in bringing down the Welfare government in June 1997 in what has been termed a "soft coup."<sup>19</sup> Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the center-right Motherland Party, formed a coalition government and became the new prime minister.

Subsequently, Welfare has been shut down and several of its leaders, including Erbakan, have been banned from politics. A new pro-Islamic party, *Fazilet* or Virtue, has come into existence

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<sup>19</sup> Heath Lowry, "Memorandum for the President: How Turkish Leaders view America and the World," in Philip D. Zelikow and Robert B. Zoellick, eds., *America and the Muslim Middle East. Memos to a President* (Washington: Aspen Institute, 1998), 161.

and has attracted many of the former Welfare members. In the recent national elections of April 1999, Virtue received 15.4 percent of the popular vote, a significant decrease from 1995 levels.

Many reasons for the decline of the Islamic party have been postulated but 15 percent remains a substantial percentage of the population. In Turkey's struggle to come to terms with its national identity, Islam plays a significant role. Although primarily a domestic concern, Islamic movements do have the ability to affect foreign policy and influence governments. A rise in the political power of those Islamists who view Israel to be anathema could be very detrimental to Turkish-Israeli relations.

#### Counter-alliances to the Turkish-Israeli Entente

Faced with superior power, states that perceive the Turkish-Israeli relationship as threatening could form an alliance of their own to balance this threat. Greece, as mentioned above, has already cooperated with Damascus and Tehran and has signed agreements. Syria, the country that perceives itself as the most threatened, has made initial moves in this direction. President Asad, for only the second time since the 1979 Islamic revolution, made a state visit to Iran in the summer of 1997.<sup>20</sup> Damascus also is seeking better relations with Baghdad. In June 1997, after 15 years of closure, Syria opened three border posts to allow trade between the two countries. Many, including the Israeli Chief of Staff, believe that these contacts are only an economic guise for more serious cooperation.<sup>21</sup> Arab collective action could also enact economic sanctions against Turkey if the situation in the Middle East deteriorates and Turkey continues its relations with Israel.

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<sup>20</sup> The first visit was in September 1990, shortly after Iraq invaded Kuwait.

<sup>21</sup> Lt. General Amnon Shahak, Address to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, The Knesset, 24 June 1997.

### **Turkey and Israel's Ability to Overcome Obstacles**

The impediments to military cooperation do pose significant obstacles to further Turkish-Israeli cooperation but none that can not be overcome. The fact that Israel must gain American concurrence to transfer US-origin technology to Turkey legally may only prove to be a slight hindrance, for as mentioned earlier, Jewish lobbies wield incredible power in Washington and could provide enough influence to ensure a favorable outcome on transfer decisions. Additionally pro-Israel groups have the power of the media to persuade Washington decision-makers. For example, the press has highly publicized the sale of the POPEYE missiles to Turkey. Israel has not requested permission to transfer these weapons to Turkey but has used the press to create an atmosphere that the deal has already been concluded. Therefore, when Israel does submit its request and the issue is taken up by U.S. decision-makers, they may conclude that the issue is a "done deal" and simply "rubber stamp" the request.

While Israel may grow tired of releasing its technology to Turkey, this does not seem significant enough to curtail relations. Israel would not jeopardize its own security by releasing highly sensitive technology and would limit the release of such technologies. Furthermore, the income from military sales to Turkey (and other countries) would enable Israeli defense industries to conduct valuable research and development and continue Israel's technological advances and superiority.

It is true that thus far, there has been a large imbalance in the amount of military trade between Turkey and Israel. However, Turkey remains determined to modernize its forces. The lack of reciprocity on the part of Israel may produce some problems but these will remain relatively minor and not contribute to deterioration of relations, at least not in the near term. As long as Israel continues to make token purchases as it has recently done with the purchase of some personnel carriers, Turkey will continue to value military trade with Israel no matter how lopsided the trade balance becomes.

While the prospects of a Syrian-Israeli peace is now at least imaginable, the actual attainment of such a peace may be elusive. The failure of Israel and Syria to settle their differences is arguably due to the lack of urgency on either side. Although hoping for an eventual peace with Syria, Israel appears content with the status quo on the Syrian track while it negotiates with the Palestinians. Likewise, President Asad, although appearing desirous of a peace with Israel before he goes to his grave, wishes to leave his successor a "good" peace. A hastily negotiated, incomplete peace settlement could seriously complicate Asad's wishes to have his son Bashar succeed to the presidency. In any event, a peace with Syria would not lessen Israel's security dilemma but would only increase it, as any peace would probably entail the forfeiture of the Golan Heights. Cooperation with Turkey would therefore become more important and not less.

While Turkey's domestic Islamic movements do have influence, the power of the military and the secular forces within Turkey are substantially greater. The removal of Erbakan and the closure of the Welfare Party demonstrated this power. The elimination of Islamic radicalism remains a priority of the state and the military stands ever vigilant to prosecute any breaches in the secular nature of the republic. For the Turkish generals, relations with Israel are vital – at least for the near to medium term – and any threat to these relations would not be tolerated. Additionally, if an Islamic party again enters the government, that, in and of itself, may not be detrimental to Turkish-Israeli relations. The secular elite of Turkey covet good relations with Israel and having a submissive Islamic leader (like Erbakan) in the government would be better than having a fanatical anti-Israel Islamic element outside of government.

The chance of a counteralliance should not be exaggerated. The Arab states have been extremely unsuccessful in previous attempts to form any type of alliance and the prospects of future cooperation are doubtful. The many outstanding issues between the Arab states are in some ways greater than the problems they have with Turkey and Israel. Likewise, Iran openly joining with any Arab state would be of great concern for the other Arab states and is highly

unlikely. While Greece has several problems with Turkey, Greek-Israeli relations are not sufficiently bad to warrant Greece's entering into an alliance with Israel's enemies.

Therefore, what remains is a promising relationship that has already provided rewards to its members and has the potential to grow. While legitimate obstacles exist, all can and will be overcome. The Turkish-Israeli entente has not yet flourished to its full potential but it has significantly effected the region. The next chapter reviews what has occurred and offers the relevance of the Turkish-Israeli entente to regional politics.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Relevance to Middle Eastern Politics**

Before attempting to relate the Turkish-Israeli entente to Middle Eastern politics it would be beneficial to review what has transpired. A structural change in the international system mitigated a fundamental shift in Turkish foreign policy. Thanks largely to the vision of Turkish President Turgut Ozal, Turkey embarked on bold foreign policy initiatives to take advantage of the new international environment and the increased room to maneuver it allowed. Turkey's activism in foreign policy sought integration with Europe, close relations with Central Asia, increased cooperation in the Black Sea region, and greater influence in the Middle East. Turkey's initiatives have all witnessed varying degrees of success but Turkey's growing relationship with Israel has been the most beneficial.

Turkey's dramatic shift in its Middle Eastern policy swiftly brought it into the American-led coalition that successfully evicted Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait. The Gulf War significantly altered the politics of the Middle East by reducing Iraq's military capability and by creating an atmosphere of cooperation. The new climate of reconciliation led to the success of the Middle East peace process and the emergence of Arab recognition of Israel. This environment in turn permitted Turkey to improve its relations with Israel.

Although the United States, as the only remaining superpower, continues to be an integral part of Turkish decision-making, Washington has been afforded only a limited role in the growing relations between Turkey and Israel. The more important incentive for closer Turkish-Israeli cooperation has been regional motives. Terrorism, weapons proliferation and increased trade underlie the desire for closer Turkish-Israeli cooperation.

Turkey and Israel have signed several agreements in various fields but the agreements that have initially provided the most benefit and have also received the most attention have been those dealing with military matters. Turkey has entered into an entente with Israel to gain

opportunities, while Israel seeks Turkish assistance to counter threats. Relations with Israel gave Turkey the opportunity to pressure Damascus to end its support to the PKK, a tactic that provided Turkey with an almost complete victory. Likewise relations with Turkey may enable Israel to counter the increasing threats of terrorism, WMD, ballistic missiles and security issues that are inherent in any "land for peace" deal.

While the military agreements have attracted the most attention, Turkish-Israeli trade relations promise to be of significant value. Turkey and Israel receive mutual benefit from closer trade relations and have not cooperated for purely security-related reasons.

The Turkish-Israeli entente is far from a complete alliance with detailed contingency plans and probably will never evolve to that level, for there is no need. The value of the Turkish-Israeli entente is to deter war, not to fight one. This does not mean that hostilities do not have the potential to emerge but merely that the reaction of the two parties must be considered before provoking either party.

The emergence of the Turkish-Israeli entente has increased the capabilities of Turkey and Israel and has altered the strategic outlook of many regional states. The change in the international system prompted Turkey to make internal changes (defense modernization) and prompted Israel to look externally (toward Turkey) in order to bolster their respective security. There are, however, a couple of questions that come to mind: Will the changes in the Middle East produced by the Turkish-Israeli entente prompt other regional members to act likewise and will these states seek allies in order to balance the perceived threat of the Turkish-Israeli entente or will they try to appease the entente? The answer to these questions depends on how the Middle Eastern states respond to threats and how they attempt to bring about security for themselves.

Jordan has always been the odd man out in the Arab world and could seek entry into the Turkish-Israeli entente. Jordan, who had observed the trilateral American-Turkish-Israeli naval maneuvers, has close military relations with Ankara and has a vested interest with its economic relations with Israel. Egypt has a peace treaty with Israel, is closely linked with the United States,

and is not directly challenged by Turkish-Israeli relations. Although Cairo may seek some political value from trying to curtail the growth of Turkish-Israeli relations, the entente should not dramatically alter Egypt's strategic outlook. Likewise, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, other moderate Arab states with close ties to the United States, seem unlikely to change their regional outlook.

There is however a saying that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, which may provide insight into how other regional members may act. Syria, the country that perceives itself as the most threatened but who has the least economic resources, cannot adequately develop its defenses internally and may, therefore, try to find external aid. Although Damascus did appease Ankara by ending its support for the PKK, it has also demonstrated its desire for a counter-alliance by becoming closer to Tehran, Athens and even Baghdad. However, because nothing substantial seems to have come of these efforts, Syria may be tempted to seek closer relations with the preeminent external power, the United States. This may conflict with Syria's regional aspirations though because a precondition to better U.S. relations would be peace with Israel and renunciation of terrorism.

Iran too is threatened by the changes in the Middle Eastern subsystem but has the economic resources to resolve its security concerns through internal means. Thus, Tehran has embarked on a weapons modernization program that includes a quest for ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Iran's ability to use internal means however does not preclude better relations with other regional members. The fact that no significant relationship has yet emerged does not negate the chance of it eventually becoming a reality.

The other threatened Middle Eastern state is Iraq. Because of artificial constraints on Iraq's resources, it is difficult to gauge its ability to respond to the changes in the region. The lifting of sanctions against Iraq will undoubtedly reenergize Baghdad's quest for ballistic missiles and WMD but its ability to approach other states for help seems limited. Therefore, Iraq will probably continue with its internal program for security.



The effect that the Turkish-Israeli entente will have on the Middle East depends largely on how Turkey and Israel manage their relationship. If directed carefully, the Turkish-Israeli entente may produce regional stability and economic prosperity. Turkey and Israel have enhanced their security and this could permit them to seek regional cooperation and may even make them more forthcoming on the divisive issues of the region. Non-threatening actions and confidence building measures by Turkey and Israel may calm the fears held by other regional members and promote cooperation. The entente could provide some states the ability to escape their relative isolation and develop relations with Turkey and Israel that enhance their own prosperity. While other states, although not warmly accepting the entente, could be persuaded to accept the changes and work together to enhance regional development.

Turkey and Israel have become regional powers. Israel's dominance has been won on the battlefield but has expanded through economic success. Turkey's position has only recently been acquired and may still be growing. Turkey's importance (and power) can be seen by its recent successes: military and diplomatic success against Syria; the expulsion of Abdullah Ocalan from various countries and the events of his capture; the prevention of the deployment of the S-300 missiles on Cyprus; a new safety regime preventing excessive tanker traffic on the Bosphorus; unrestricted ability to cross into northern Iraq; and participation in numerous peacekeeping missions including military actions against Yugoslavia. Furthermore, Turkey's economy has been quite impressive despite a recent downturn that has tempered some expectations.

Whether or not a powerful and self-confident Turkey and Israel will be able to constrain their actions is uncertain. If one looks at the past five years though, it seems that Turkey has been the most assertive. Turkey's regional position has rapidly improved and its future appears quite promising. However, for reasons of regional stability, it is important for Turkey to proceed cautiously. Israel too must be very cautious as it makes difficult choices pertaining to its future. The decisions of Turkey and Israel will go a long way in creating a new Middle East where regional cooperation will be able to replace political competition.

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